

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 22 Issue 3

March 2013

## March 2013 Meeting:

Sunday Mar. 24, 1:00-3:00 PM,  
Hannaford Suites Hotel

### The State of the Secular Movement

Speakers: Amanda Metskas and August Brunzman

Representing two major organizations in the secular movement focused on youth, August and Amanda will share their perspectives on where the secular movement in the United States is heading in the next years. The past few years have brought rapid growth for Camp Quest, the Secular Student Alliance, and the community as a whole. We've seen increased cooperation and visibility for secular worldviews through organizations like the Secular Coalition for America and events like the Reason Rally and the annual "HEADS Meeting" leadership summit for national secular organizations. At the same time, our movement is experiencing growing pains as we try to welcome a fast growing and increasingly diverse group of nontheists into our communities, and we try to figure out what it will take to meet the needs of the "nones" and encourage them to actively participate. The movement is a different place than it was a few years ago, and the next few years will bring more change. Come hear two longtime leaders share their take on the most pressing issues before the secular community, and what we might expect in the years ahead.



**Amanda K. Metskas** is the executive director of Camp Quest, Inc. She has been involved with Camp Quest since 2003, and served on the board of directors from 2004-2007. Amanda became executive director when Camp Quest, Inc. hired her as its first staff person in January 2008. As executive director, Amanda focuses on providing coordination and support services to all of the Camp Quest programs, and helps launch new Camp Quest camps across North America.

In addition to her work with Camp Quest, Amanda is the Vice President of the Secular Coalition for America. She coauthored *Raising Freethinkers: A Practical Guide for Parenting Beyond Belief* with Dale McGowan, Molleen Matsumura and Jan Devor. Amanda holds an M.A. in political science from The Ohio State University, and a B.A. in international relations and psychology from Brown University. She lives in Columbus, Ohio with her husband August E. Brunzman IV and their two cats. <amanda.metskas@campquest.org>, office: 614-441-9534.

**August Brunzman** is the executive director of the Secular Student Alliance. He has served in that position since 2001, and started getting paid for it in 2004. He also worked as a programmer for the Institute for Humanist Studies from 2001 to 2004. In 1997 he cofounded Students for Freethought at the Ohio State University where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 2001 majoring in psychology and minoring in mathematics and cognitive science.

He is the Secretary of the Board of the Humanist Community of Central Ohio. He has volunteered in a number of roles for Camp Quest since 1999. August served as the Secretary of the Board of the Secular Coalition for America from 2006 through 2012. <august@secularstudents.org>.

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## Events

### March 2013 Meeting

Sunday March 24, 1:00-3:00 PM  
Hannaford Suites Hotel  
5900 East Galbraith Rd.  
Cincinnati, OH

### April 2013 Meeting

TBD  
Hannaford Suites Hotel

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## February Meeting

### Dead Sea Scrolls Exhibit

By Shawn Jeffers

FIG organized a trip to view the Dead Sea Scrolls: Life and Faith in Ancient Times exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center on February 24 and we had a great group of 27 people join FIG for the tour.

The exhibit is on display through April 14, 2013 and the Cincinnati Museum Center shares the following description of the exhibit:

Witness the largest and most comprehensive collection of ancient artifacts from Israel ever organized in Dead Sea Scrolls: Life and Faith in Ancient Times at Cincinnati Museum Center. Considered among the world's greatest archaeological discoveries, the Dead Sea Scrolls contain the oldest known copies of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient handwritten texts of the words that shaped the future of the Western world. Of the more than 600 objects from the Biblical to Byzantine Period including religious articles, weapons of war, stone carvings, textiles, ceramics and fragments of the Scrolls, many have never been publicly exhibited before now.

The tour starts with a short performance piece highlighting the history through three pieces of pottery recovered from ancient Canaan (modern day land of Israel). The presentation also highlights how the scrolls were found (or at least the fabled version). In 1947, a Bedouin goat herder was chasing a goat into a cave near the dead sea scrolls and he threw a rock at the goat in the cave. His rock missed the goat, but he heard the sound of pottery shattering from inside the cave. The goat herder returned the next day to search the cave hoping to find gold or treasure in the cave, but instead discovered a scroll wrapped in linen. Archaeologists soon began to research in the area and discovered over 900 scrolls containing ancient writings.



Dead Sea Scrolls, similar to Torah Scrolls, are written on a parchment made of animal skin. Most written documents would be unable to survive 2000 years of exposure to the elements. However, since the Dead Sea is at the lowest elevation on Earth and contains a uniquely low level of humidity that allows for the preservation of the documents.

The actual Dead Sea Scrolls that traveled to Cincinnati are displayed in the Communal Scroll Table. The 25-foot diameter, white table displays and protects the priceless 2,000 year old Dead Sea Scrolls and is the main showpiece of the exhibition. It contains ten individual display chambers, one for each scroll, along with the full English translation, a large high resolution image and a full explanation of each



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scroll's religious and historical significance. Not only is the Communal Scroll Table used as a focal point in the exhibit, it also has a crucial role in the conservation of the scrolls. Because of the fragility of the scrolls, they may only be on display for three months at a time before they



must "rest" in complete darkness for one year.

In addition to the scrolls, the exhibit features more than 600 objects from the Biblical to Byzantine Periods in

Israel. Artifacts include remains of religious articles, weapons of war, stone carvings, textiles and beautiful mosaics along with everyday household items such as jewelry and ceramics. Also featured is a compelling scale recreation of a section of Jerusalem's Western Wall - complete with an authentic three ton stone from the Wall in Israel. The exhibit also provides insight into how ancient Israelites lived. One example is the Israelite Four Room House, which was the typical house of ancient Israel. In the house, there was a room on the first floor where the domestic animals would be kept, an open air area for cooking, and the residents of the house would live on the second floor of the house. The animals provided warmth that kept the homeowners above them warm on cold evenings.

The exhibit concludes by highlighting the local connection to the Dead Sea Scrolls through Hebrew Union College. Nelson Glueck, an archaeologist, was involved in Dead Sea Scroll discoveries since the original scroll was found in 1947. He was appointed President of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1949 and was instrumental in encouraging scholarly research of the scrolls at Hebrew Union.



The only possible criticism of the exhibit was that at times it presented information about religious claims without a critical inquiry into those claims. This is not too surprising since the Museum Center wanted interest in the exhibit to be far reaching. That being said, the exhibit's benefits far outweighed any criticism and provided an interesting glimpse into the ancient world that was definitely worth the price of admission.

## The Agnostics' Creed

(Updated by anonymous based on the studies of historians and theologians over the past fifty years.)

Should I believe in a god whose existence cannot be proven and said god if he/she/it exists resides in an unproven, human created, spirit state of bliss called heaven?

I believe there was a first century, Jewish, simple, preacherman who was conceived by a Jewish carpenter named Joseph living in Nazareth and born of a young Jewish woman named Mary. (Some say he was a *mamzer*.)

Jesus was summarily crucified for being a temple rabble rouser by the Roman troops in Jerusalem serving under Pontius Pilate,

He was buried in an unmarked grave and still lies a mouldering in the ground somewhere outside of Jerusalem.

Said Jesus' story was embellished and "mythicized" by many semi-fiction writers. Bodily resurrection and ascension stories were promulgated to compete with the Emperor-is-the-Son-of-God myths. Said stories were so popular that they grew into a religion known today as Christianity and featuring dark age, daily wine to blood and bread to body rituals called the eucharistic sacrifice of the non-atoning Jesus.



A new pastor visited a children's Sunday School. After standing quietly at the back for a few minutes, he asked the youngsters: "Who tore down the walls of Jericho?"

"It wasn't me," shouted young Timmy.

The pastor was unfazed, and repeated: "Come along now, who tore down the walls of Jericho?"

The teacher took the pastor to one side. "Look, Pastor, Timmy's a good boy. If he said he didn't do it, I believe him."





## Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



This month I will conclude my series on the greater biblical message as presented by Protestant Christian tradition. Two months ago I discussed the fall of man and last month I discussed sacrifice and redemption. This month I will examine the doctrines of eternal reward and damnation, heaven and hell.

If you ask the typical Christian to explain God's plan for humanity they will tell you it is all about love. Out of love Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice wanting us to love him back (see John 3:16 quoted last month). That nasty threat of hell is nothing more than his effort to coerce the most stubborn of us into his arms.

Punishment is useful for instruction, deterrence and retribution. Parents punish wayward children to teach them and alter their future behavior, but an eternal hell obliterates any future and fails to be instructive. Since we have no evidence that a hell is real and cannot interview anyone who has been there; hell also fails as a deterrent. The only other need that hell can fulfill for God is retribution; rather than being a story of love his plan appears to be about vengeance and sadism.

Traditional Protestant Christian doctrine also claims that belief in Jesus is the only way to escape hell making it more a place of punishment for nonbelievers than sinners, yet you cannot come to believe a nonsensical story based on a threat. A claim that unicorns exist doesn't gain credibility if the speaker pulls out a gun. On this point, hell again does not fulfill its purpose and is mired in contradiction.

As a Christian I was always bothered by the idea of hell, it did not correlate with my conception of a loving god. Why didn't God just obliterate sinners? In John 6:54 Jesus promised his followers eternal life (existence) implying that the alternative is death (nonexistence); but the doctrine of hell is not death but also eternal existence, but a very, very nasty existence full of the worst suffering imaginable. Once again this doesn't make sense.

If the whole point of the gospel message were love and forgiveness, then why would torture be necessary? If someone wrongs us and then offers a sincere apology, do we need someone else to die before we can forgive them? Of course not, if we believe the offender is truly sorry and then we easily extend forgiveness. Does it make sense that mere mortals can do something that an allpowerful god

cannot? For any being with the emotional stability of the average adult, hell would be unnecessary.

Actually the situation presented by the Christian is even more absurd than this analogy. According to the Bible's narrative, God creates defective beings that cannot live according to rules he arbitrarily made up. Then he declares that he can only forgive them for being that way if he kills part of himself as payment to himself. And only the humans gullible enough to believe the story without evidence can have this forgiveness no matter how morally they behave.

Okay, enough about hell, now let us talk about the alternative. We are told that heaven is a place of eternal bliss where there will never be any suffering, crying or sadness. All sin will be gone and believers will live forever happy in communion with God, praising him, worshiping him and singing hymns for all time.

When we ask Christian apologists why their god didn't just put us in heaven in the first place (by making us unable to sin) we are told that God couldn't because he had to give us free will. He desired us to love him by choice not because he forced us to, and that required free will. Remember that the Bible says that in heaven there will be no sin, yet humanity can choose to sin as long as they possess free will. From this we must conclude that there can be no free will in heaven. Without free will the righteous can look forward to an eternity being little more than robots with no choice but to inflate the ego of a god who needs to hear how wonderful he is. So in spite of his initial desire, God still ends up with beings praising and loving him that cannot do otherwise.

Not only that, but heaven's occupants will also have to either be unfeeling or suffer from mass amnesia. I say this because anyone going to heaven is bound to have family, friends or loved ones that won't make it there, meaning they are in hell. The only solution is for them to no longer remember or no longer care about their loved ones. Without their memory and emotions, any part of the believer that exists in this "heaven" it is no longer the person they were in life. So in this heaven the believer has no freedom, nothing to care about, no memories, no ambition, no goals and no longer who they were on Earth. Hell isn't looking quite so bad.

As you can see, the greater Christian Biblical message is no more rational or coherent than any of the other contradictions that I've written about for more than a year. See you next month. ⌘



THINGS TO DO....

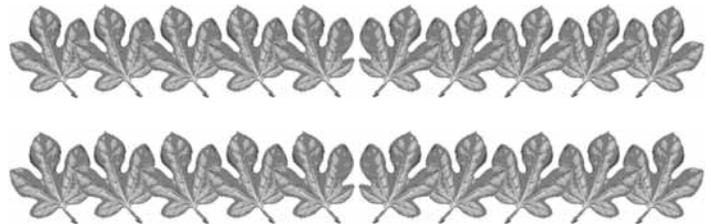
THINGS TO SEE...



## How Many Cells Does It Take To Make A Person?

A month ago the US Supreme Court ended an effort to shut down government support of human embryonic stem cell research by refusing to hear a case that challenged the legality of such work at NIH. Good! Embryonic stem-cell research is thought by many to be the most promising approach to treatment of numerous human diseases, but twenty years ago anti-abortionists pushed a bill through Congress banning the use of federal funds for research on human embryos. Some religions believe the Holy Ghost bestows a soul on a zygote at the moment of conception, making the zygote a one-celled person. The Obama administration rejected this silly superstition, but it was kept alive in the courts by the appeal process. Rejection of the appeal by the Supreme Court assures resumption of potentially lifesaving stemcell research..

- What's New by Robert L. Park, 8 February 2013



## Upcoming Meetups

**Wednesday, March 6, 2013; 6:00 PM**

Guest Speaker: Jerry Dewitt from  
The Clergy Project & Recovering From Religion  
Radisson Hotel Cincinnati Riverfront  
668 West 5th Street  
Covington, KY 41011

**Thursday, March 7, 2013; 7:00 PM**

First Thursday @ Pomodorii's Pizzeria  
121 W Mcmillan St.  
Cincinnati, OH 45219

**Monday, March 18, 2013 6:30 PM**

Monthly Monday Meetup @ Rio Grande  
Mexican Restaurant  
40 Carothers Road, Newport, KY 41071

**Thursday, April 4, 2013; 7:00 PM**

A First Thursday @ Pomodori's Pizzeria  
121 W Mcmillan St.  
Cincinnati, OH 45219

## Science Book Club

### 2013 Schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of the month except in June on the 2nd Sunday. All meetings at the Cincinnati and Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A except in February in the Huennefeld Tower Room and in March and May in room 3B.

**March 17 (room 3b)** *The Swerve : How the World Became Modern* - Stephen Greenblatt, 2011.

**April 21** *The Universal Sense : How Hearing Shapes the Mind* - Seth S. Horowitz, 2012.

**May 19 (room 3B)** *Personality Types: a Systems Science Explanation* - Walter Lowen, 2007

**June 9** *Why Does the World Exist? An existential Detective Story* - Jim Holt

**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





## In Germany

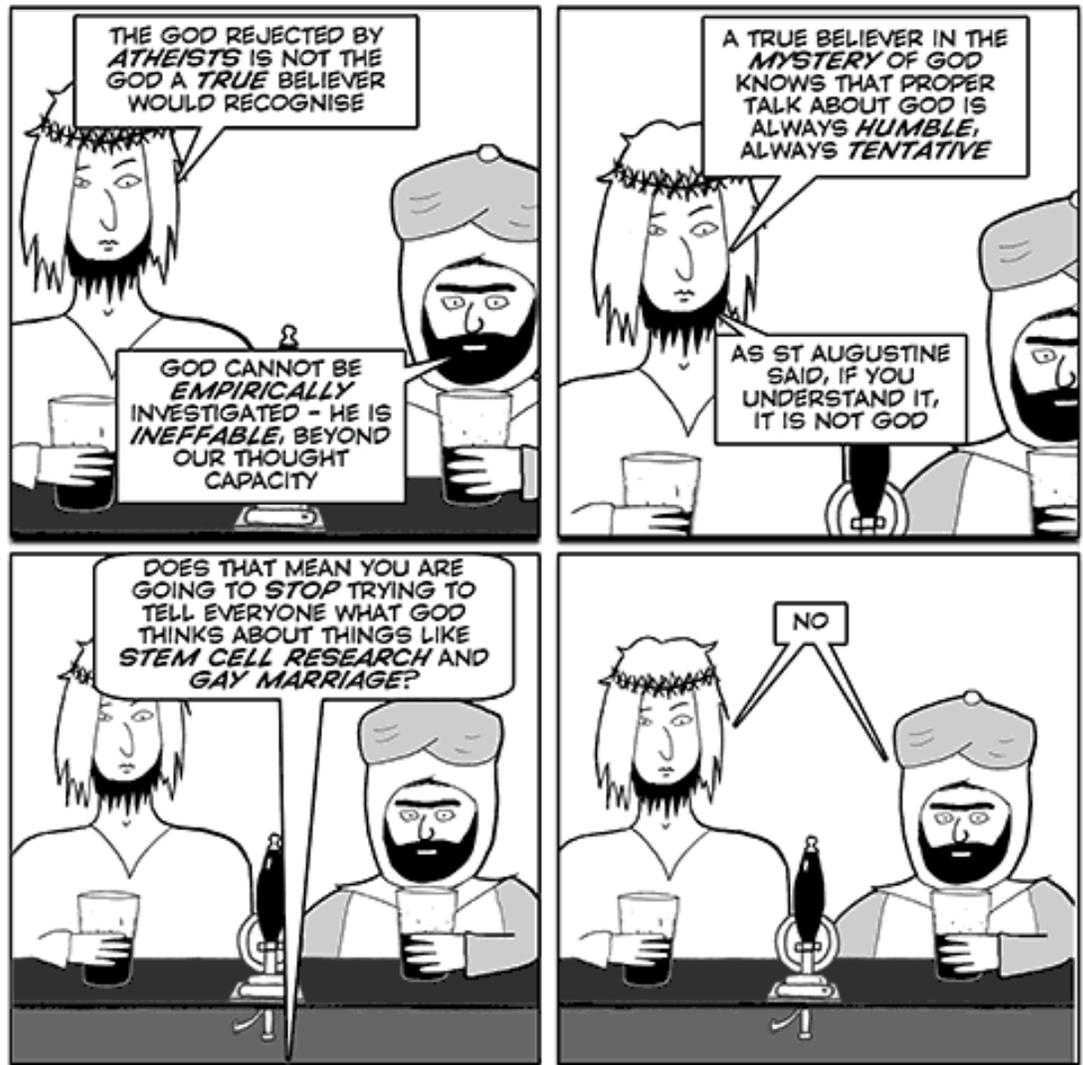
by Victor Grossman,  
*SpeakOut*, 15 February 2013

When Pope Benedict XVI was elected in 2005, the first German Pope since Victor II (1055-1057 succeeded by a Pope Stephen), the dominant mass rag here, the Springer syndicate's *Bild* newspaper, had a page high headline "We Are Pope!" Now alas, this distinction will disappear, which may especially sadden the big L-shaped Roman Catholic area of Germany - the Southern tier, especially Bavaria, then northward along the Rhine valley. The rest is largely Evangelical (Lutheran), including eastern Germany; other religious faiths are small minorities, aside from the Turks and other Muslims. Or the pagans! Both Catholic and Evangelical churches had hoped for big gains after East Germany was "freed from atheist repression". To their disappointment, there was no rush into the churches. One reason was widespread lack of interest or any belief in a God or heaven. Another key factor is the church tax, automatically taken out of all wages, salaries, even royalty fees for every member of the Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish and some other faiths, an 8 or 9 percent surcharge on the income tax! Less than 30 percent of Easterners decided to pay, even though it made them ineligible for church weddings and funerals. In the West, 79 percent are still members. But there, too, many Roman Catholics have rebelled against

Rome's rules on marriage, women and family planning; a nasty refusal by a Catholic hospital recently to treat a battered rape victim or help her prevent a pregnancy increased such rebelliousness.

### Compelling Reason, God crushed.

The issues director of the fundamentalist American Family Association told his radio audience that God's feelings will be hurt if America stops using fossil fuels for energy. "God has buried those treasures there because he loves to see us find them," said Bryan Fischer, who described Americans' campaign against fossil fuels as similar to the time when Fischer, at age six, told a birthday present donor that he didn't like his gift. "And it just crushed that person."



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## The Real Church Scandal

By Herb Silverman,

*The Washington Post*, 22 February 2013

I have faith that the pope reads my *On Faith* blogs because he followed my advice in a column in 2010. “Popes sometimes choose the name of a previous pope whose reign they wish to emulate. Whether coincidental or not, Pope Benedict XVI can take the same action as a morally challenged namesake. In 1045, Pope Benedict IX resigned.” However, since the pope has never taken any of my other advice, perhaps I shouldn’t rely on faith to justify a conclusion devoid of evidence.



How much faith do I have that the next pope will be significantly better than the current one? Not much, because Benedict appointed more than 57 percent of the cardinals who will choose his successor. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic, but only because the papal improvement bar is set so low. Why should I even care who the next very fallible pope is? Thanks to the HBO documentary *Mea Maxima Culpa*, and other revelations, the world is finally paying attention to pedophilia within the church, and the next pope won’t have as much coverup freedom as previous popes.

If Catholics choose to be counseled about marital or sexual difficulties by celibate priests, that’s their right. But I’m amazed by a church that opposes both abortion and condom use that reduces the number of abortions; that requires celibacy before marriage, yet opposes masturbation, which makes it easier to remain celibate; that requires married women to be fruitful and multiply regardless of circumstances, but prevents church leaders from being fruitful and multiplying; that encourages monogamous marriage to avoid promiscuity, yet opposes monogamous marriage for committed gays.

I especially worry about an increasingly politically engaged Church that tries to impose its religious prohibitions (contraception, gay marriage, stem cell research, etc.) on non-Catholics. If a pope can ignore the evidence and argue that condom use increases the risk of AIDS spreading, I can argue against a church that is helping to spread a virus that infects the rest of the world, not just its faithful sheep. I wish Catholics would ignore the pontiff when he pontificates theologically, and even more so when he pontificates politically. Liberalizing any of these prohibitions by a new pope would be an improvement, but I must admit that part of me wants the next pope to be even more severe, and not because I’m a sadist. The scandals, coverups, and misogynistic views of the church have significantly damaged its reputation and reduced the ranks of those who adhere to Church doctrine. What if the next pope were the Catholic equivalent of Pastor Fred

Phelps, of Westboro Baptist Church, whose views make the current pope seem like a gay rights activist? Fortunately, Phelps has a tiny following. Not so, the pope.

My concerns about Catholic Church doctrine affecting the world are mostly sex related. Morality should not be viewed through the narrow prism of sexual conduct. Although sex is an important part of life, there is much more to life than sex, and much more to morality than sex. Ethical and moral behavior is about treating others with respect, dignity, and compassion.

A lot has already been written about what the next pope should do, and probably won’t do. While I don’t expect “miracles,” I hope for a modest papal change on a position that hasn’t received much attention: the church’s opposition to the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted by the UN General Assembly- “The Holy See does not accept so called ‘harm reduction’ efforts related to drug use.” There is conclusive evidence that needle exchange programs are a valuable component in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. I challenge the church to produce even a mustard seed worth of evidence that addicts would stop using drugs if they lacked clean needles. Further, some who enroll in needle exchange programs develop relationships with their providers, who sometimes assist them in giving up drugs. If the next pope really wants to help the least among us, he could begin by revising policies that endanger drug addicted people without the wherewithal to obtain clean needles. The church might choose to believe that telling gays and drug addicts to repent for their sins has been effective, but health professionals who live in the real world recognize drug addiction as a health issue that requires realistic preventive and treatment programs.

The church can cry “abstinence only” until the sperm come home, but lives are being destroyed by this faithbased approach. Drug addicts have been burning while Nero like popes have fiddled in Rome. It’s time for a change, of popes and of at least a few of the damaging policies that place more emphasis on abstract doctrines than on suffering humans.

Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America, author of “Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt,” and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.





## Christians Evangelizing Military Youth On The Taxpayer's Dime

By Mikey Weinstein, *AlterNet* | *OpEd*, 24 February 2013

Quentin Tarantino deals in tawdry fiction writ large, bloody, and outrageous, as is the case with his latest Best Picture Oscar nominated exploitation epic, *Django Unchained*. Even he would be cowed by the pathetic tale of woe that follows.

From the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, U.S. military service members and their families have borne the tragic brunt of prolonged operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Herculean task at hand, spanning the full spectrum of human endurance, from coping with multiple deployments to the hopelessly bleak, inhospitable front lines of the War on Terror hasn't fallen on war fighters alone. Indeed, the oozing sores of perpetual anxiety, debilitating depression, and other extreme disorders have proven themselves across military and civilian communities to be communicable diseases, affecting service members and their dependents alike. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has become a household word across the nation, as active duty service members, for the first time in a generation, are more likely to fall on their own swords and take their own lives than face death in a war zone. This national tragedy continues to play out despite the phasing out of the U.S. role in Iraq and a sharp drop in troop levels in Afghanistan.

Some of the most acute psychological torment has fallen heaviest on service members' children. Speaking as a veteran "military brat" from a family with a long and proud multi-generational tradition of service in our nation's armed forces, I can surely empathize with these youth in terms of the trials that they face.

Enter Tarantinoesque fiction except it's real.

It came as a sickening jolt of shock when we at the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) learned that a group of savagely opportunistic fundamentalist Christian vultures known as "Club Beyond" are using taxpayer dollars, let me emphasize that point one more time: **TAXPAYER DOLLARS** and Department of Defense property to aggressively prey on these youth, as well as advertising their activities via

the official Army.mil website. Club Beyond's mission, in their own words, is to "'celebrate life with military kids, introducing them to the life giver, Jesus Christ, and helping them to become more like him,' while offering youth a chance build meaningful relationships." All of the foregoing would be just fine and dandy if only the United States military was not subject to the United States Constitution but it is. Thus, the just mentioned "sickening jolt."

In other words, Club Beyond's nefariously unconstitutional modus operandi is the outright, incontestable proselytization and religious indoctrination of vulnerable youth perceived to be "unchurched." Club Beyond is a sectarian enterprise with global reach. It's a subsidiary of a raging fundamentalist Christian parachurch organization called "Military Community Youth Ministries" (MCYM). MCYM offers, get this, "well chaperoned" weekly 90 minute club meetings, retreats, and Bible Study courses facilitated by "staff and volunteers [that] love young people and are available to journey with them through the hard challenges of adolescence, providing positive role models and exhibiting Christlike behavior." Uh huh. Want some more?

Ok. Well, one of the ways that Club Beyond shows its "love" for these captive audiences is by hosting so called "Purity Conferences," events where the widely debunked abstinence only movement is, ahem, propagated. In fact, this year's Valentine's Day was the occasion for one such "Virginity Ball," an event called "Can't Lose." At this "ball," rather than receiving a realistic sexual education, youth enmeshed in a cannonade of hormonal tides of teenage passion are schooled solely in the ways of puritanical self-denial. The "virginity movement" has long been exposed as a transparent, fundamentalist Christian campaign that perniciously undermines reproductive health and cloaks old school misogyny of the very worst kind in mawkish rhetoric regarding "preserving yourself for your future husband." Yep. That'll work for sure.

In 2012's annual "Wastebook" published by the office of Senator Tom Coburn (ROK) in case you didn't notice, a Republican the glut of wasteful "nondefense" spending by the Pentagon earned it the notorious and ignominious title of the "Department of Everything." ☛



As our brilliant MRFF Senior Research Director Ms. Chris Rodda uncovered, a not insignificant portion of these shamefully gluttonous expenditures skirt not only the realm of usefulness in the field of national defense but are utterly devoid of lawful constitutionality as well. A virtual king's ransom has been set aside by the Department of Defense (DoD) for the wretchedly theocratic purpose of "saving souls," with a major portion of this sum going directly towards MCYM. Since 2000, this child targeting, taxpayer funded, proselytizing monstrosity has received a little known largesse of literally hundreds of lucrative DoD contracts for the explicitly stated purpose of evangelizing ever vulnerable military youth. In 2011 alone it received nearly \$2 million, and in 2012 this sum increased to nearly \$2.5 million! It goes without saying that this treasure of treachery represents a staggering violation of the First Amendment's No Establishment Clause, which clearly prohibits the intertwining of church and state.

As our excellent researcher Ms. Rodda also noted, the cold, calculated, clever, cult like tactics of these fundamentalist Christian parachurch madrassas include luring teens to pizza parties and movie nights, infiltrating the public schools surrounding military bases, and quite literally stalking minors by following their school buses from their on post school bus stops to their off post public schools. Wait...did I really say stalking minors by following their school buses? Indeed I did. It would be one thing if these sectarian religious predators carried out this style of proselytizing on their own time and own dime, as is the case with The Gideons International, who leave Bibles in the dressers of seedy motels. What MRFF takes grave exception to is the hideous fact that the DoD contract descriptions THEMSELVES actually command the utilization of these buzzard like, textbook, ambulance chasing tactics, totally negating the Constitution's "No Religious Test" mandate (see Clause 3, Article VI). Noting that the military base "Religious Education Director" and other related positions are the exclusive domain of Christians, contracts include the requirement to "ensure [that] all programs and activities are inclusive of all Christian traditions." Further, the DoD contract descriptions urge these state sanctioned, uberfundamentalist Christian proselytizing vultures to "use a variety of communica-

tions medium that shall appeal to a diverse group of youth, such as music, skits, games, humor, and a clear, concise, relevant presentation of the Gospel." What? No candy, bubblegum, kittens, puppies, and popcorn?

These stinking travesties, odiously repulsive in their own right, represent merely the tip of the tip of a proverbial iceberg threatening not only the bedrock Constitutional protections of our military personnel and their families, but our comprehensive national security as well. The campaign to indoctrinate our military youth, at taxpayer expense, with the apocalyptic dogmas of fundamentalist Christianity goes hand in hand with other acts meant to advance a scurrilous Dominionist agenda such as the Pentagon's recently discovered blocking of LGBT websites. Under the false guise of "freedom of religion," Constitutional tramps have been given carte blanche to ride roughshod over the foundational religious rights of service members and their families, most importantly their right to go unmolested by hectoring, seething, salivating proselytizers of Christian "Talibanism." The eventual goal of these parachurch Mafioso entities isn't simply to comfort military youth by assisting them in some sectarian conception of what constitutes a "walk with God." Quite on the contrary, the obsession is to raise a "Crusader force" championing weaponized Christianity to be more specific, a twisted version steeped and marinated in poisonous, parochial religious exclusivity, supremacy, exceptionalism, and belligerent fundamentalist backwardness. To underestimate the enormity of the colossal danger posed by this fifth column to America's core Constitutional values, not to mention our strategic national security interests, would be a fatal mistake of literally Jovian proportion.

It must be stopped. It must be stopped now. Perhaps the next DoD Secretary is listening?

Michael L. "Mikey" Weinstein is president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and an honor graduate of the Air Force Academy. He previously served as White House Counsel in the Reagan administration and general counsel to H. Ross Perot and Perot Systems Corp. He is the author of the recently released book, *No Snowflake in an Avalanche: The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, Its Battle to Defend the Constitution and One Family's Courageous War Against Religious Extremism in High Places*, (2012, Vireo). ☞



## On Feb. 12, Should Darwin Get His Day?

By Herb Silverman, *Washington Post*, 5 February 2013

February 12, 1809 must have seemed like an ordinary day to those alive at the time, but we now know it to be the birth day of two giants of humanity: Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin. Lincoln ended slavery in the United States in the 19th century, and Darwin made one of the greatest scientific discoveries of the 19th century. The same types of people vilified both these great men, often for the same reasons.

Slaveholders had economic incentives to maintain their abominable institution, encouraged by the blessing of southern clergy and politicians who biblically justified the morality of human slavery. Rev. Richard Furman, from my hometown of Charleston, was the first president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and founder of the university that bears his name. Said Furman, "The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example." Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, added, "Slavery was established by the decree of Almighty God. It is sanctioned in the Bible, in both testaments, from Genesis to Revelation." Many northern progressive Christians were abolitionists, they would have lost handily in biblical debates against southern religious literalists.

Today Abraham Lincoln is revered for what he accomplished, and the humanist principle that it is morally wrong for one person to own another is commonly accepted.

Charles Darwin, on the other hand, is far from universally respected in the United States, where too many religious authorities still treat the Bible as a science book. We wouldn't expect scientifically ignorant biblical writers who lived thousands of years ago in a small corner of the Mediterranean to have described the theory of evolution (or DNA, or any discovery of modern science), and they didn't. What we do find in the Bible is a flat, unmoving Earth at the center of a 6,000 year old universe, and the whole number three as the true value of pi [1 Kings 7:23]. The modern scientific theory of evolution conflicts with Genesis, and describes how natural selection can easily explain our existence without need for a divine creator.

When I was young, public schools were closed on Darwin's birthday, though the official reason was to commemorate

the birth of Abraham Lincoln. Now there is a growing movement to publicly celebrate February 12 as Darwin Day. But instead of closing schools, I'd like to see it become a day for students to study and explore the great scientific discoveries that spring from Darwin's work.

With encouragement from the American Humanist Association, Rep. Rush Holt (DNJ) proposed H. Res. 41 to Congress, expressing support for the designation of February 12, 2013, as Darwin Day and recognizing the importance of science in the betterment of humanity. While I'm thrilled to see this resolution introduced by Rep. Holt and cosponsors, I'm not optimistic about its passage. Why? Because, for example, one of the members of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee who will consider this House resolution is Rep. Paul Broun (RGA). He referred to evolution (and the Big Bang) as "lies straight from the pit of hell."

Religious forces have been trying to water down science education in public schools at least since the time of Darwin. In response, atheists and scientifically minded theists are joining forces to promote science and educate communities about evolution. This includes a number of "friendly" debates between atheists and Darwinian theists.

For example, my academic institution, the College of Charleston, holds an annual "Darwin Week." Dr. Rob Dillon, who is both an evolutionary biologist and a committed Christian, organizes the yearly event. In 2011, he arranged a debate between Dr. Karl Giberson (physics professor and vice president of the BioLogos forum founded by Dr. Francis Collins of the Genome Project) and me. We argued the question "Does science make belief in God harder or easier?" This year's debate between an atheist and a Christian asks "Are Science and Faith Compatible?"

Both sides in these debates accept the theory of evolution, but dispute its implications. Christian evolutionists try to show the compatibility of evolution and Christianity, fearing that people who are forced to choose between the two will dismiss evolution. Atheists tend to agree with religious fundamentalists that scientific naturalism is incompatible with belief in an intervening deity. In my debate, for instance, Dr. Giberson concurred that science has proven many biblical miracles to be false, but he said Christians should believe in the Resurrection miracle because it's essential to Christianity. Hmm. That's not an easy position to hold.

While we can look back with astonishment at the scientifically illiterate geocentric battles of the Middle Ages, most of the western world regards our current evolution battles with equal amazement. The theory of evolution is not controversial within any scientific community. But in this country many religious and political groups have successfully promulgated the view that Darwin's work is significantly flawed, which explains why about half our populace remain suspicious of evolution.

Moral issues are more easily understood than scientific issues, which helps to explain why so many Americans who reject slavery still cling to a world view that includes "scientific" creationism. When an unknown Charles Darwin set sail on the *Beagle* in 1831, he was a firm creationist. Confronted by the evidence unearthed during years of study, he changed his mind. Celebrating Darwin Day on February 12 won't eliminate all ignorance of and disrespect for the scientific method, but it would be a positive step. Perhaps it will lead to a more enlightened era when even religious conservatives accept evolution, just as they came to accept an earth that revolves around the sun.



## BOOK REVIEW

*The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*  
by Stephen Greenblatt  
(New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 2011)

The recovery in the Renaissance of a single manuscript of the book length poem *de rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things) by the Roman poet Titus Lucretius Carus (ca 99 - 55 BCE) may be considered a major event in the history of humanism. Lucretius expounds a remarkably modern secular view. Everything is made of tiny invisible particles; these are in constant motion in an infinite void; the universe has neither creator nor designer; nature experiments, and new things come into existence as a result of swerve - a chance change of direction. Such swerve makes possible "free will" in humans and animals. The world is not about or for humans, nor are humans unique or privileged. Whatever is human, the soul dies, and there is not afterlife. Religions are superstitious delusions and invariably cruel. Thus the goal of man is the good life, rational pleasure in this world.

On the other side of anger at those who either peddled false visions of security or incited irrational fears of death, Lucretius offered a feeling of liberation and the power to stare down what had once seemed so menacing. What human beings can and should do, he wrote is to conquer their fears, accept the fact that they themselves and all the things they encounter are transitory, and embrace the beauty and the pleasure of the world.(p. 6)

Lucretius is explaining the philosophy and teaching of Epicurus, who lived about two hundred years earlier, and in turn relied on the ideas of Democritus and Leucippus, to whom we owe the atomistic theory. Very little is known about these thinkers, nor have many of their writings come down to us. The growing Christian churches detested naturalistic ideas, and very effectively destroyed or neglected such writings. Greenblatt emphasizes repeatedly that the survival of even one copy of Lucretius' poem is a miracle, or better a lucky swerve. The book is about the discovery of this manuscript in the library of a German abbey by Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459).

Poggio was a scribe, a scholar who mastered the Latin language and was able to compose in it. With the language Poggio also mastered an elegant, clear, and easily read hand writing. He was thus in an excellent position to judge and copy ancient Roman manuscripts; something he made his life's work. He also served several Popes and other prelates as secretary or scribe. However, not much is

really known about Poggio's life, so that Greenblatt covers at great length what little there is.

Much of the book consists of diversions from the life of the protagonist, to tell a riveting tale about the life and events in that cultural "swerve" we know as the Renaissance. We learn about actual life in Rome, about the Papacy and the Curia, the civil government of the Pope's lands which consisted of most of central Italy. Most of the clergy was utterly corrupt, mainly interested in acquiring wealth, the leaders lacked all belief, and practiced a hypocrisy beyond credibility. At this time Europe was under the rule of three Popes, John XXIII in Rome, Benedict XIII in Avignon, and the Venetian Gregory XII. All are considered Antipopes by the Church. To remove them, a council was called in Constance, which lasted in one form or another for four years, 1414-1418, and drew hundreds of whores to serve hundreds of clergy. While they were at it they promised the reformer Jan Hus a safe conduct, only to betray him and burn him at the stake.

Towards the end Greenblatt examines the effect *de rerum natura* had at a time when the educated class could read the poem in the original Latin. Thomas More's Utopia is conceived as a humanistic world, except that More thought god was needed to instill fear, for without fear of god nobody would be moral or obey the laws. Giordano Bruno was influenced by Lucretius, but went much further in his description of the Universe. Even the works of Shakespeare and Montaigne show the influence of the humanistic ideas of Lucretius.

- Wolf Roder

### From: **On the Nature of the Universe**

Therefore this terror and darkness of the mind  
Not by the sun's rays, nor the bright shafts of day,  
Must be dispersed, as is most necessary,  
But by the face of nature and her laws.

We start from her first great principle  
That nothing ever by divine power comes from nothing.  
For sure fear holds so much the minds of men  
Because they see many things happen in earth and sky  
Of which they can by no means see the causes,  
And think them being done by power divine.  
So when we have seen that nothing can be created  
From nothing, we shall at once discern more clearly  
The object of our search, both from the source from  
which each thing  
Can be created, and the manner in which  
Things come into being without the aid of gods.

Titus Lucretius Carus (ca 99 - ca 55 BCE),  
*de rerum natura* (1:145-1:158)



Hannaford Suites Hotel  
TBD  
**April FIG Meeting**

Hannaford Suites Hotel  
Sunday March 24, 2013, 1:00-3:00 PM  
**March FIG Meeting**



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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](http://gofigger.org) or [freeinquirygroup.org](http://freeinquirygroup.org).