

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 21 Issue 5

May 2012

## May FIG Meeting:

Sunday, May 20 1:00 PM,

### A Day in Pompeii

Cincinnati Museum Center

1301 Western Avenue Cincinnati, OH 45203

For our May Meeting, we will attend the Pompeii exhibit on display at the Cincinnati Museum Center. Tickets are \$12 a person for dues paying FIG Members, \$16.50 for non-FIG members (Museum Center tickets for regular admission are \$19.50 a person and \$16.50 per person for the group rate.) Contact Shawn Jeffers at 513.404.8191 or figcincinnati@gmail.com to reserve a ticket.

Here is the Cincinnati Museum Center's description of the exhibit:

The Roman city of Pompeii was frozen in time by the catastrophic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Pompeii's archeological treasures rarely leave Italy, and this national touring exhibit marks the first time that these rare treasures will come to the region. Room-sized frescos, marble and bronze sculptures, jewelry, gold coins, and hundreds of priceless ancient artifacts join body casts of the volcano's victims, eerily preserved in their final frantic moments. Don't miss this glimpse through a unique window into the ancient past.

Prior to the exhibit we will do brunch at 11:00am at Frisch's just south of the Museum Center (1001 Gest Street, Cincinnati 45203). The Frisch's provides a place to gather and also a potential for carpooling or group walking) so we can save money on parking at the Museum Center.

Contact Shawn Jeffers at 513.404.8191 or figcincinnati@gmail.com to reserve a ticket for Pompeii or to attend brunch.

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## Events

### Note dates & times

### May 2012 Meeting

Sunday May 20, 1 PM,  
Cincinnati Museum Center  
1301 Western Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45203

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## A Few Words From The New Vice-President

*Hello fellow freethinkers!*

My name is Chuck Byrd. On April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012, I officially stepped into the role of Vice President of The Free Inquiry Group of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

I'm a six year recovering Catholic with a sense of humor. I have a wife and daughter, whom many of you have met. I have very left leaning politics and as far as my current religious beliefs... well, you should be able to figure them out on your own!

I've attended F.I.G. meetings and events on and off for a few years now. However, since I'd previously worked second shift, my involvement in the group was limited. Now that I find myself on the unpleasant end of the ever growing down-sized population, I decided to become more directly involved in one of the groups I feel the most passionate about: F.I.G. While I try to figure out where the next chapter of my life leads, I'm happy to become a more active member of the group and its board.

I strongly believe in the first amendment of the constitution and the right of people and their pursuit of happiness. My main objective as a freethinker is to keep the wall that separates church and state as tall as the Carew Tower. I don't want the religious "minority" making policy for me, my family, or my friends. I don't believe in the so-called christian god or his unfertilized son jesus. I'm against forcing children to believe in the fairy tale known as the bible. In fact, I believe this is borderline child abuse.

I also want to mention a few events and speakers that we are pursuing for the group in the remaining months of 2012: I will be signing F.I.G. up to have a presence in The Northside 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade. Shawn Jeffers is looking into signing us up for the Cincinnati Pride Parade. I've secured speakers for the September and October meetings. In September, Rich Stevenson will be giving a talk about politics. Rich is the Green Party candidate for Congress in Ohio's 1<sup>st</sup> District for the November election. In October, my friend Justin Patrick Moore will be giving a talk to the group about occult history in Cincinnati. Justin is a local writer and works at the Main Library in downtown Cincinnati. He also has a program on WAIF 88.3 FM on Thursday nights from 10:00pm to Midnight called "On the Way to the Peak of Normal."

I look forward to meeting everyone at future events and meetings. I can be reached at >chuckbyrd@aurorerepress.com< if anyone has any comments or suggestions.

- Thank you, Chuck Byrd



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

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 One year: \$30  
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We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.





March Meeting

## Breaking Their Will

Janet Heimlich is a journalist who released her first book in 2011 after years of research. While working as a reporter for National Public Radio she found it hard to be non-biased about some of the topics she wrote about. Child maltreatment was one of them. She studied individuals and court cases extensively as background for writing "Breaking Their Will: Shedding Light on Religious Child Maltreatment."

Janet began her talk by referring to Lawyer Marcie Hamilton's book, "God Versus the Gavel." "The United States has a romantic attitude towards religious individuals as though they are always doing what is right. The unrealistic belief that religion is always for the good is a hazardous myth."

Most memoirs about growing up with religious maltreatment are about a particular sect. Ms. Heimlich wanted to get to the underlying patterns contributing to what she calls child maltreatment. She defines child maltreatment as child abuse or neglect that is enabled by religious beliefs held by perpetrators or their surrounding community. Examples include: justifying physical abuse with scripture or doctrine, using one's religious status to sexually abuse children and procure their silence, spurning, terrorizing, or exploiting victims with religious messages, indoctrinating or isolating children or otherwise presenting them with a very narrow religious world view, failure to provide needed medical care due to beliefs about faith healing and divine intervention, and failure to report abuse to protect the image of a religion, faith leader or religious community.

Three factors create the environment where maltreatment occurs: strict social hierarchy, fearful cultures, and social separatism. These cultish factors are basic to the severe authoritarian and totalitarian environments that appear time after time in the cases that Heimlich researched. All aspects of a child's life are

determined not by their parents or by their own choice but by the leaders of the sect. She pointed out that the parents at the Jonestown tragedy had no choice in the fate of their children. Abuse is too often reported to religious leaders instead of the secular authorities. They claim they can punish and rehabilitate their own but unfortunately this only delays or interferes with a lawful investigation. Children are taught to always honor and obey their parents even if they are abusive. Questioning authority figures is



L-R Janet Heimlich, Christine Woodman

almost unheard of in some of these environments. The kids are also taught to expect a horrific punishment in the afterlife for any wrongdoing in this life. The idea that forgiveness is a requirement of the religion is detrimental as the kids think that it is their duty to forgive an abusive adult again and again. Hence the perpetrators are rarely reported and brought to justice. The most detrimental

aspect to children of these religious groups is the idea that the leaders can do no wrong. Parents often expose their children to harm and refuse to believe it if abuse is reported because they think that nothing can go wrong when their children are with a religious leader. Children are reluctant to report wrong doing when they think that the religious leader is infallible. They often take the responsibility for the abuse on themselves.

These religious groups will go to great lengths to protect themselves. Their members contribute to the perpetuation of child maltreatment when they cover up wrongdoing, whether it is by a leader of the group or any group member. As an example, the Catholic Church covered up abuses by priests for years simply by transferring the offenders to another parish. This perpetuated the problem because the abusers continued the wrong doing while the church was protected. All of this was at the expense of innocent children.

Occasionally we hear about a child who has died as a result of medical neglect. This often happens unnecessarily as the disease is treatable with modern medicine but the religious leaders and parents of the child forego medicine in favor of faith healing. Ms. ➡



Heimlich pointed out that this is just the tip of the iceberg. How much suffering takes place that we don't hear about when children are denied aspirin for a headache or lotion for poison ivy for example? There are many states that have religious exemption laws stating that it is unlawful to intervene in a case of religious "treatment" for a disease or ailment. Several groups are now attempting to protect children by repealing those laws.

Ms. Heimlich also briefly touched on the fearfulness of these groups by pointing out that in many cultures in Africa, the Christian religion is being used to accuse and punish children for being involved in witchcraft. Any child who is too inquisitive or misbehaves can be accused of being a witch. Bad luck or failure of adults in their village is an excuse to accuse them. Many are "exorcized" of their alleged demons with the use of acid or fire. Although it is not as prevalent in this country as others, the concept of honor killing is often an abuse of children in Islamic cultures. An underage girl can be accused of dishonoring her family by just talking to a boy or even by being raped. The honor of the family is preserved by killing her.

In the second half of the program Christine Woodman shared her childhood experiences of religious maltreatment. She works in religious studies and the sociology of religion. This was the first time she had spoken publicly about her childhood. Raised as an Independent Baptist, Christine wanted to make us understand that maltreatment is not an unusual occurrence. Her mother felt obligated to use a proscribed punishment as discipline in order to be a good parent and bring up her child "for Jesus." Christine spoke through tears about several instances that happened in her childhood at home and at a school for girls. Her talk was emotional and extremely moving. Christine rightly stated that she is morally obligated to do something about this problem.

Religious privilege is rampant in this country. Authorities are so reluctant to be seen as restricting religious freedom that they refuse to act or tread lightly in prosecuting these cases. Some states are repealing the preferential laws and prosecuting these crimes. In her book Ms. Heimlich asks parents to examine what they can do to stop religious maltreatment and raise awareness of these issues.

Only two countries have NOT ratified the UN's The Convention on the Rights of the Child: the United States

and Somalia. Children have rights. We all should strive to end these abuses.

Janet and Christine have started a foundation called Child Friendly Faith. This organization does not promote or denigrate any religion, place of worship, or faith group. It acknowledges that religion has the ability to both help and harm children. The ultimate goal of CFF is to ensure that a religious or spiritual upbringing is a healthy experience for every child.

– Reported by John Welte

To find out more about this subject, to buy the book, or to learn more about the foundation visit: <http://religiouschildmaltreatment.com/>

<http://religiouschildmaltreatment.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Breaking Their Will Religious Child Abuse and Neglect/205904649439000>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/childfriendlyfaith/>



## American Culture

If there is an eternity  
 Let me sit at the table with debs and other  
 american socialists,  
 Muckrakers, unionists, and thinkers

Let me chat with tarbell and sandburg

Let me sing with joe hill and guthrie

Let me sit silently  
 As I listen to fdr and w e b dubois talk about the  
 future

At night

Let me contemplate the eternal with  
 jefferson, thoreau, whitman, and zinn

and

if i am good

maybe sam clemens will lead us all in prayer

Paul J. Cech, July 2009



## Science Cafe

### NASA Needs a Makeover

Dean Regas is the Co-host of Stargazers and Outreach Director for the Cincinnati Observatory. He was the first to speak for the Cincinnati Science Café and now he is the first speaker to make a repeat appearance at the Science Café. The subject of his talk this time was NASA. He discussed NASA's previous and current successes as well as its failures and its promising future. It was interesting to see an astronomer's view of these details as well as other aspects of space exploration, including budgeting problems and the search for extraterrestrial life.



Among NASA's successes Dean listed the Apollo Program, the Mars Missions and the Cassini space probe. He recounted the excitement that surrounded the first manned mission to the moon. He asked how many watched it on TV. Everyone over a certain age raised their hands. Dean observed that either you were alive at the time and old enough to have watched it or you simply were not yet born and that is why you didn't watch it. He showed some stills and videos of that mission that are burned into the memories of those that were alive to see it. His question for the audience was, "What do you think would get you that excited about a space mission today or in the near future?" In Dean's opinion NASA needs to send a manned mission to Mars to generate interest and excitement in the space program again. Part of the attraction of the Apollo missions was the fact that we were in competition with the Russians to be the first on the Moon. Dean welcomes rumors from China that they are interested in sending humans to Mars. If they are, he thinks Americans would once again be compelled to compete for another scientific first.

Dean also discussed the Mars unmanned probes that functioned far beyond the expectations of even the NASA experts. We have learned a lot about the red planet in a safe and much less expensive way than if we had sent a manned mission. One of the things we found on Mars was water ice. The Cassini probe has also sent back wonderful images of the outer planets and their moons.

One of the most interesting moons is Enceladus. Cassini's cameras caught geysers of water vapor escaping from the moon into space. Another amazing moon is Europa, which seems to be covered with oceans of ice. NASA's plan for searching for extraterrestrial life is to "follow the water." All life that we know of needs water to survive so it is natural to expect that alien life would also need it.

One of the great questions we face in the future of space exploration is "to man or not to man?" Will we be able to afford the added expense and danger involved with manned missions or should we continue using unmanned robots and ships? Will the excitement and interest that a manned mission would generate offset the dangers in the minds of the public and NASA's administration? Whatever decisions that are made will have to satisfy the natural curiosity of the human species in order to be viable options.

- reported by John Welte

Science Cafes are free monthly events that bring together scientists with their community to share stories about their research and discoveries. Cincinnati is home to many working scientists who are performing breakthrough studies in our own backyard, but these scientists rarely have a chance to speak about their amazing research to members of the community. Everyone is invited to attend, enjoy a dinner of fish and chips, drink a frosty lager, and learn about the wonders of scientific progress. How cool is that?

Science Cafes generally follow the schedule: 6pm - Dinner and Pre-Talk Discussion 7pm - Speaker (talks usually run 45 minutes-1 hour) 8pm - Q&A, Trivia, Prizes and Speaker Meet & Greet Feel free to join us for all or part of the event. The "Cincy Science Cafe" will always encourage our speakers to allow plenty of time for questions and answers. The organizers want these events to be a conversation, and not a lecture. We often save time for fun trivia and correct answers are awarded door prizes!

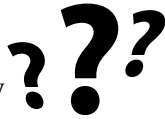
"Cincy Science Cafe" is put on by The Skeptical Society of Cincinnati, a member of the NOVA ScienceNOW network. We also are partnering with University of Cincinnati's Sigma Xi organization, the Free Inquiry Group, and the Association of Rational Thought to bring these events to the Cincinnati Area.





## Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



Welcome to the next article in my ongoing discussion of apologist arguments used to support theism. Today I will discuss the Moral Argument for God. In a nutshell, this is usually some variation of the idea that there is such a thing as absolute morality and it must come from an absolute authority identified as a divine being. The apologist claims that we cannot know right from wrong without an ultimate authority to provide us with that information. Probably the best known proponent of the Moral Argument was C.S. Lewis author of the *Chronicles of Narnia* books.

In our day to day activities we learn which behaviors produce desired outcomes. We began doing this as a child and over time build an ethical system with our choices reinforced or penalized by parents, siblings and peers. In essence morality is primarily the ability to empathize and choosing to act upon it. If I steal from or lie to others; I won't be trusted. If we all simultaneously chose to violate societal norms then society would break down, so we make laws to prevent it. Nothing in this process requires supernatural intervention. The burden of proof in this argument falls on the apologist to show a need for divine intervention in a process that can be fully explained by evolution, human learning processes, and common sense.

The most obvious weakness in the Moral Argument is use of the word "absolute". In this context it is meant to imply something universal that applies to all frames of reference. At first glance this may seem logical, but such thinking fails to take into account that there are sociopaths and psychopaths that lack empathy and do not share our morals or values. Likewise, when you compare the values of various cultures and tribes throughout the world, you will see enormous variation in ethical codes.

For example, in some Middle Eastern countries, a woman who has been raped or even caught in the same room with a man she is not related to might get a death sentence. Only this week, NPR radio had a news article about an Afghan woman fleeing her brothers who threaten to kill her just for talking to a man on a cell phone. Likewise, many in our culture once thought slavery was fine, but virtually none think so today. In the mid 1800's it was common for children to be virtual

slaves working long days in sweatshops; yet today very few people would find this acceptable.

The theist may admit ethical variations but claim others are still universal. They cite immoral acts such as cannibalism or infanticide as always wrong. Yet there are indigenous peoples in backwater locations that still practice cannibalism and human sacrifice of infants was not unusual in the ancient world.

I recall having a very interesting conversation with a young lady who was outraged that Humanists behave morally. In her mind they were borrowing their morality from the Bible without giving God the credit for providing it. This statement shows a total misunderstanding of human behavior as well as her Bible.

Anyone claiming the Bible as the foundation of morality either has very bad morals or lacks knowledge of its contents. Exodus 21:20-21 tells the slave owner that it is alright to beat a slave as long as they don't die. In Leviticus 25:44-55 the ancient Israelites are commanded by God to enslave all neighboring peoples in Numbers chapters 16, 21, and 31, they are ordered to exterminate entire nations including killing women, children and livestock.

Such immorality is not exclusive to the Old Testament either, in Matthew 19:12 we are told that Jesus endorses self-mutilation as a means to enter the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 6:19-34 Jesus tells us not to plan ahead or save for the future. How successful would capitalism be in America today if all the Christians took his advice? Ephesians 5:22 encourages women to be submissive to their husbands as they would be to God and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 forbids women even to speak in church. This is not the morality shared by the typical American.

So, why doesn't the average Christian see a contradiction between typical American morality and the Bible? Because the believer typically reads the Bible to reinforce the values and morals they already have, they do not alter their existing morality to fit the Bible. Holy books are like mirrors, they are so voluminous and arbitrary that they only serve to reflect the preconceived notions of the reader.

The Morality Argument is such a large topic that I will continue the discussion in my next article.





**THINGS TO DO....**

**THINGS TO SEE...**



## **WVXU Fund Drive - May 21<sup>st</sup>, 4:00 PM - 6:30 PM**

The Spring WVXU Fund Drive is one of 3 such events this public radio station has each year.

FIG is looking for volunteers to help answer pledge phone calls and enter the data directly into a computer.

This is a great opportunity for us to

- Perform community service
- Support a tremendous resource for objective reporting and original content (you know ... the stuff we free-thinkers love.)
- Get some publicity for FIG
- Have a good time with friends, old and new

The only requirements are a willingness to answer the phone, a very minimal familiarity with computers and a commitment to be there **on May 21<sup>st</sup> from 3:45 - 6:30 PM**. Be there at 3:45pm for checkout.

### **Location:**

WVXU 91.7 FM  
1223 Central Parkway  
Cincinnati, OH 45214  
(WCET Entrance, convenient parking in Music Hall garage or on the street.)

To volunteer please either email [FIGcincinnati@gmail.com](mailto:FIGcincinnati@gmail.com) or call 513-404-8191 by May 18<sup>th</sup>. Thanks!



### **Upcoming Meetups**

Monday, May 21, 2012 6:30 PM  
Monthly Monday Meetup  
at The Washington Platform

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

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

## **Science Book Club**

2012 Schedule, books, and dates

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

**May 20** — *A Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life*, Craig Venter 2007 (room 3B)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



### *Quote*

**Water Guns Banned, Handguns Allowed at GOP Convention**

“In the politically-charged and likely protest-filled streets of Tampa, Fla., during the Republican National Convention in August, water guns will be strictly prohibited. Concealed handguns, on the other hand, will be perfectly legal.”

— Amy Bingham, *ABC OTUS News*

*Unquote*

### *Quote*

A pessimist thinks everybody is as nasty as himself, and hates them for it.

George Bernard Shaw

*Unquote*





From *Mumbai Mirror*,  
18 April 2012

One man files complaint against Sanal Edamaruku who dismissed water dripping from Jesus statue as due to capillary action, saying he had made statements against the Church. This in Mumbai which

was the birthplace of the Indian Rationalist Association (IRA), founded in 1930 by Mumbaikar R P Paranjpe. Almost a century later, it has also become the first city to have an formal complaint (FIR) filed against the President of the IRA.

The FIR has been filed by another Mumbaikar, Agnelo Fernandes, President of the Maharashtra Christian Youth Forum. CR 61/2012, Juhu Police Station, has been filed against miracle-buster Sanal Edamaruku, who is also founder-president of the Rationalist International, which has scientists such as Richard Dawkins in it. The FIR has been filed under IPC Sec 295A: Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. The offence is cognizable and non-bailable.

The whole story began on March 5, when during a TV programme in Delhi, Sanal dismissed reports that the "dripping cross" outside Vile Parle's Velankanni church was a miracle. TV-9 asked him to investigate and flew him down on March 10. Sanal visited the spot and took pictures.

Born to rationalist parents, Sanal has, for the last 30 years, travelled across the country demonstrating the science behind supposed miracles. He has exposed the man-made nature of the 'divine flame' at Sabarimala, and successfully challenged Hindu godmen on TV.

Later on March 10, Sanal attributed the water dripping from the Jesus statue to capillary action of underground water near the cross. His photographs, displayed on TV-9, showed seepage on the wall behind the cross and on the ground near its base. "I removed one of the stones covering a canal for dirty water nearby, and found that water had been blocked there. Once water is blocked, it will find an outlet, if not downwards, then upwards. Every student knows that trees get water through capillary action."

Sanal said that when he reached the spot, a priest was leading a prayer on the road near the cross; water from the cross had been collected in a bucket and was being

distributed to those gathered there. He was given a photograph of the statue dripping water with the word 'miracle' written on it. He said he was not allowed to take a sample of the water for chemical analysis.

During the subsequent TV discussions in Delhi



and Mumbai, Sanal accused the Catholic Church of "miracle mongering". Interestingly, in Mumbai, Archbishop Agnelo Gracias, who joined the discussion, categorically stated that the Church had not described the event as a miracle and would do so only after conducting investigations. The Archbishop also claimed that the Church was not anti-science and, in fact, it had established the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, of which Galileo had been a member.

At that point, Sanal pointed out that the Church had imprisoned Galileo, and burnt scientist Giordano Bruno at the stake, and Pope John Paul II had even apologised for it. He also asked the Archbishop what he had to say about the Vatican indulging in exorcism, to which the Archbishop replied that though he had not come across any case of "possession", he could not rule it out.

All through the discussion, the other panelists kept warning Sanal that they would file FIRs against him if he didn't apologise for his allegations against the Church. The discussion ended with Sanal declaring that the Church's intolerance had resulted in the Dark Ages in Europe. "Don't try to bring the Dark Ages to India," he said.

Fernandes lodged a complaint against Sanal at Juhu Police Station on April 10. Another complaint was lodged at the MIDC Police Station. In his complaint, Fernandes states that statements made against the Church and the Pope by Sanal had hurt his religious feelings. Sanal, who lives in Delhi, said, "The Indian Constitution enjoins me to develop scientific temper. Let them arrest me, I'm not going to stop doing my fundamental duty."

A Sanal Edamaruku Defence Committee has been convened by lawyer N D Pancholi. Meanwhile, Mumbai police have called him here for questioning.







## The Annual Joint Conference of the Council for Secular Humanism and the Center for Inquiry

Report by David and Wendy Walsh, from *The Separationist* (March 2012), the newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Low Country, (SHL)

SHL members David and Wendy

Walsh attended the Annual Joint Conference of the Council for Secular Humanism and the Center for Inquiry held in Orlando, Florida, March 1 to 4, 2012. The conference, *Moving Secularism Forward*, featured speakers who covered a wide range of humanist topics during the three days of meetings. As usual, there was a book sale where you could purchase books authored by some of the speakers.

Ronald Lindsay, president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, opened the conference and stated that the goals the secular humanists movement should work toward: reducing the influence of religion on public policy and stop the flow of tax dollars to religious groups who are using public funds to promote religious agendas.

Former US House of Representatives member Patricia Schroeder discussed the rise of religious fundamentalists in American politics. She said that this trend threatens religious freedom. She spoke about the First Amendment and the importance of maintaining the separation church and state in the United States.

Steven Law, lecturer in philosophy from Heythrop College, University of London, discussed the reasons why supposedly educated and scientifically literate people have ridiculous belief systems. He listed belief in astrology, psychics, the healing powers of magnets, supernatural beings and the prophecies of Nostradamus as examples of these ludicrous beliefs. His latest book is *Believing in Bullshit*.

Rita Swan, former Christian Scientist, talked about how her former religion's faith healing beliefs led to the death of her infant son. She is now the president of the Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, an organization promoting laws at the state level to make it illegal to withhold medical treatment from children because of their parents' religious beliefs.

Nobel Prize winner Harold Kroto spoke of the importance of science education. He noted, however, that our educational system seems to be failing to effectively teach science.

For CD's of the conference, visit <http://bit.ly/msf2012>



## Some Comment-Quotes On Religion And The American Revolution

selected by D. E. W. Turner

I finished reading *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763 - 1789* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2005) by Robert Middlekauff. It is a well-written book and is quite fair to both sides. I found interesting the place the author gives religion in the reasons for the Revolution:

Religion, especially after 1740, displayed similar contradictions. In nine colonies, an established church - one that received public taxes - held forth. But the most fervent believers remained outside its doors with no intention of applying for admission. They followed the call of the Spirit and despised the formality and the rationalism - they called it sin - in the established bodies. Even these enthusiasts differed among themselves on many matters. The sacraments aroused disagreements, as did the qualifications of their clergy, the education of their children, and the order of worship.

Congregationalists with a desire for purity had settled New England in the seventeenth century, and they continued to insist on their version of it for themselves, though not for others, in the eighteenth. After the turn of the century they had to contend with increasingly powerful groups of Anglicans, Quakers, and Baptists who fought for exemptions from paying taxes to the Congregational establishment and thereby demonstrated an aversion in common. But these groups agreed on little else. . . ." (pages 46 - 47)

"Although Americans entered the revolt against Britain in several ways, their religion proved important in all of them, important even to the lukewarm and the indifferent. It did because, more than anything else in America, religion shaped culture. And as different as the colonies were, they possessed a common culture - values, ideals, a way of looking at and responding to the world - which held them together in the crisis of upheaval and war. To be sure the churches in the colonies differed from one another. But beneath the surface their similarities were even more striking - a governance so dominated by laymen as to constitute a congregational democracy, a clergy much weaker than its European analogue, and a religious life marked by attenuated liturgies and an emphasis on individual experience. This last characteristic was not prominent in the Anglican Church, but worship even in Anglican establishments partook considerably of low-church practice." (pages 49 - 50)





## The United States Military ...

### A Crusader Force?

By Michael L Weinstein, *Truthout / News Analysis*, 02 May 2012

We know that the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other mujahideen feel that they are involved in a holy war. Do US military personnel also see themselves in this role?

Countless armed forces members have reached out to the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) over the last nearly seven years to express their dire concern regarding the proliferation of literature, imagery, insignia, and much more which indicates that, indeed, some do see themselves as the Christian extremist counterparts of their Islamic fundamentalist, Salafi-Jihadist foes. This extremely dangerous Islamophobia, inextricably intertwined into the very fabric of the US armed forces, has reached such a dire level of toxicity that it caused America's highest-ranking soldier to actually DO something about it just last week on April 24, 2012. Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued an unprecedented directive tasking the entire US military at all levels, top to bottom, to immediately review all of its official training and educational programs and to eliminate any anti-Muslim and/or anti-Islam bias that is currently present therein. Talking the talk is one thing that the Pentagon does well. It's cheap, fast and easy to seemingly balm the wounds of unconstitutional civil rights abuses by such idle and too-often disingenuous chatter. Walking the talk is quite another matter and one in which the Department of Defense has an absolutely abysmal and shameful record.

Case in point: the recent decision to rename Beaufort, South Carolina-based Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 122 (VMFA-122) the "Crusaders" and adopt the red cross of the crusading medieval Knights Templar. (Note photo)

This alarming decision to rechristen the jet fighter squadron as "Crusaders" threatens to reignite the explosive tension and anti-American rage that exists across the Muslim world. "Crusader" is an epithet that is routinely used to describe US military personnel throughout the Arab and Islamic world. A phrase which literally means "taking up the cross," Crusader recalls a history of colonization and campaigns of conquest and plunder spearheaded by European Christian military orders. Spanning three centuries and starting in the year 1096, the crusades viciously claimed the lives of millions



of inhabitants of the Middle East. While motivated by the secular incentives of lucre and mammon, the Crusades serve as a hideous testament to the noxious danger embodied by the foreboding alloy of weaponized theology.

In March 2012, al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri referred to International Security Assistance Force troops stationed in Afghanistan as "Crusader Swine." During last year's NATO intervention in Libya, then-leader Muammar Qaddafi referred to Western forces as a "crusader alliance." Likewise, insurgent forces in Iraq and Afghanistan-Pakistan have regularly called US personnel "crusaders."

In 2008, the Marine's F-18 Hornet Fighter Attack squadron VMFA-122 was renamed the "Werewolves" after having borne the "Crusaders" label since 1958. With United States service personnel based across the Arab and Islamic world, the "Crusaders" name was dropped due to its clearly incendiary and offensive nature. At the time, VMFA-122's Squadron Commander Lt. Col. William Lieblein wisely stated, "The notion of being a crusader in that part of the world doesn't float." ❧





## A National Day of Reason?

By Herb Silverman

I strongly support the National Day of Reason, although I wish it weren't needed. There would be no National Day of Reason if there were not a government-endorsed National Day of Prayer.

Though held annually on the same day, the first Thursday in May, there is a major difference—and not just in terms of reason vs. faith. Some government officials claim that the National Day of Prayer represents a broad interfaith coalition, which it does not. Shirley Dobson, wife of James Dobson, heads the event. Together they promote conservative Christian causes. However, even if the event were religiously inclusive, it would still exclude millions of Americans who do not pray, and it marginalizes them as second-class citizens.

As a secular country with a secular Constitution, our government should not favor one religion over another, or religion over non-religion. But for those who truly want to be inclusive of all Americans, I have a solution: Have the government sponsor two separate days—a National Day of Prayer and a National Day of Non-Prayer, a day on which Christians might then appreciate how atheists and humanists feel about a government pushing prayer.

That said, I don't need a president or anyone else telling me to set aside a special day to not pray, because I happily do not pray every day. On the other hand, those who wish to pray every day are free to do so without government urging. Our government should never tell its citizens when, how, or whether to pray.

It is truly disturbing that so many Americans now object to reason. Would these same individuals also complain about a National Day of Science? There was a time when Americans would feel embarrassed by their ignorance of science or their disdain of reason. Not so much, anymore. An article in the Christian Post described how the American Humanist Association and the Secular Coalition for America have joined forces to counter the National Day of Prayer by promoting a National Day of Reason. In the article, a Christian Coalition spokesperson, Billy McCormack, called the National Day of Reason "a blatant assault on Christianity." One hopes that some Christians will be uncomfortable on learning that their fellow Christians describe "reason" as an assault on Christianity.

Perhaps a number of religious people will also support the proclamation sponsored by Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.),

which begins: "The National Day of Reason celebrates the application of reason and the positive impact it has had on humanity. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm the Constitutional separation of religion and government." After all, our founders who wisely separated religion from government would be appalled by those who call for the separation of reason from government.

Here's one final difference between the National Day of Prayer and a National Day of Reason. Many secular groups plan to observe the National Day of Reason by advocating and performing community service projects or other good works. Robert Ingersoll, a nineteenth-century Republican and humanist whom I greatly admire said, "The hands that help are better far than the lips that pray." I wish more Republicans (and Democrats) today would share this view.



### We're All Related

By Carolyn Clark 2/12/90

---celebrating the birth of Charles Darwin February 12, 1809

The baffle-headed duck and Chilean Man,  
microscopic protozoan and Cro-Magnon Man,  
the duck-bill platypus and Java Man,  
the myrtle warbler and Neanderthal Man,  
the hermit thrush and Peking Man,  
the two-toed sloth and Australopithecus,  
a million-year-old ape man.

Species are threatened with extinction  
and many don't give a damn.

Hey! We're all one big family  
in a big jam.

Most elephants are being murdered,  
the rain forests are being burned,  
and our greatest threat is Modern Man.

Ours is a small, fragile planet  
and people are not concerned if the animals  
will survive.

We can give our Earth a bright future  
through tender love and care ---  
or we can stick our heads further in the sand  
and hide.



**June FIG Meeting**  
 June 26, 7-9 PM  
 TBD



**May FIG Meeting**  
 May 20, 1:00 PM  
 Cincinnati Museum Center



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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).