

FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 10

November 2006

November FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 28 November 7:00 PM

Election 2006: What does it Mean For Us?

Speaker: the Reverend Mendle Adams

Results in recent elections have been attributed to voter blocs such as “soccer moms,” “Nascar Dads,” and “values voters.” The election in 2006 is labeled as a referendum on the war in Iraq. The results of this election will play a significant role in how the presidential election in 2008 is framed.

Reverend Mendle Adams will join FIG on Tuesday, November 28 to discuss the results of this elections and analyze its impact on the major social issues of today, including how religion and government may operate in the new Congress.

Born in a fundamentalist Christian home, Reverend Adams was raised attending fundamentalist Bible School and College. However, as a reverend, Mendle has championed causes of social justice, working for Equal Rights Ratification, Witness of Peace, The Nuclear Freeze, and Gay Rights. As ecumenical campus chaplain at Oklahoma State University, Reverend Adams was the only clergy member to join the ACLU lawsuit against the board of regents to allow the students to show the film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The movie was deemed “blasphemous” by the Board of Regents, but the ACLU suit was victorious in court, the movie was shown, and the Chairman of the Board of Regents was forced to step down. Reverend Adams also served in the Indiana House of Representatives, where he established his credentials as a “thoughtful and liberal Democrat.”

Since 1997 Mendle Adams has been the senior pastor at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ. He met FIG members, Edwin and Helen Kagin, while he was a pastor in Union, Kentucky during the campaign to defeat the location of the Answers in Genesis “Creationist Museum” next to Big Bone State Park. With Mendle’s range of experience and expertise, he is sure to provide a lively presentation that will lead to deep discussion on the coming trends in Washington.

December Fig Meeting: Tuesday, 19 December, 7:00 PM

Dr. Seuss Wants You!

Long before he achieved fame as a children’s author, Dr. Seuss served from 1941 to 1943 as an editorial cartoonist at the New York newspaper *PM*. Until the summer of 1941, three of every four Americans opposed our involvement in World War II. Through his uncompromising cartoons Seuss was a clear voice urging America to join our fighting allies. Once America became involved in the war, Seuss continued to urge Americans to support the military through the purchase of War Bonds. FIG member Shawn Jeffers will share the engaging political cartoons captured in the exhibit, *Dr. Seuss Wants You!* and explore other famous freethinkers from the greatest generation.

Inside Page

October Meeting by George Maurer	2
Poem - The Super Myth by Dr. Dorothy B. Thompson.....	4
In the News	5
Science Book Club	6
How the Non-Religious can Deal with the Holidays	7
How a State Funded Healthcare program turned into a Global Crusade.....	8
Things CNN will never tell you about Religion.....	9
Bad Reasons to be Good ..	10
<i>Why Truth Matters</i> by Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom.	
Book Review.....	11

Events

November Meeting

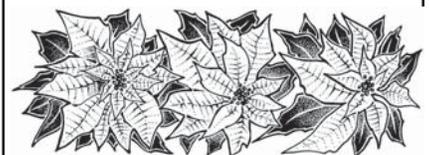
Tuesday, November 28 , 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

December Potluck

*No Potluck - Enjoy some time
with family and friends!*

December Meeting

Tuesday, December 19 , 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH





October Meeting...

Not Dan Brown's Kind of Evidence: Facts, Fictions And Fables about Freemasonry

Speaker: Conrad Goeringer,
Senior Staff Writer for American Atheist Magazine



After a brief introduction of how Dan Brown fits into tonight's discussion about Freemasonry and why it is relevant, the speaker pointed out that Brown is working on a book scheduled to come out next year reportedly titled: *The Sullivan Case* in which, reportedly, he is bringing back many of the characters from *The Da Vinci Code* and the story line contains a number of scenes that deal with hidden codes, conspiracies, and groups like the Freemasons. Why should we be concerned with all this? For starters, there is the question of truth, which requires drawing on the best credible evidence. This didn't happen in *The Da*

Vinci Code. Brown raised questions about early Christianity and its purported god-man Jesus Christ. But what could have been a very thoughtful examination turned into a hodgepodge of dubious assertions that resulted in a real turkey shoot for the critics. Brown didn't provide us with good supporting evidence to back up his claims and shoddy speculations. Would you want this same approach in dealing with other historical subjects? This is the reason I am concerned about Dan Brown considering the subject matter of the Freemasons.

Freemasonry has been the subject of speculation and, I would argue, unfair attacks. Writers with political or religious axes to grind, popes and preachers have condemned it, and conspiracy theories have exploited it with little or no regard for the historical facts. I want to give you some background on what it is, where it may have originated and why so many people have condemned it. I also want to say a few words about whether Freemasonry has any relevance in modern Europe. Further I want to give you a little history of the interesting links between Freemasonry and Freethought, and particularly the role that Freemasonry and the Masons played in the Enlightenment that came to America, the movements it inspired especially the American Revolution.

First of all, let me tell you, as far as I can determine, what Freemasonry isn't: It is not a religion. Some parts of its symbols have religious elements but these lack that sectarian quality that you see with organized religion. What looks like a religious artifact frequently possesses a deeper allegorical meaning. One of the characteristics of Freemasonry is a tolerance of all religious viewpoints. Most Masonic groups prohibit a discussion of religion and politics while they are meeting in lodge. Most groups in the United States and England require a belief in a god or deity but they won't be specific about that might be about, leaving the specifics up to the individual. A number of European and South American Masonic Orders admit atheists, agnostics or pantheists.

Freemasonry is not a political movement. It doesn't support candidates. Most



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

figleaves@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. 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., its board, or officers.

FIG Board of Directors:

President: Margaret O'Kain,
Vice President: Donna Loughry
Secretary: George Maurer,
Treasurer: Bill O'Kain,
Program Chair: Shawn Jeffers,
Members: Michele Grinoch,
Helen Kagin,
Bryan Sellers,
Philip Ferguson,
Joe Levee,

FIG Leaves Editor: Wolf Roder.



Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.
One year: \$25
Family: \$35
Subscription: \$10

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.



FIG LEAVES



Masonic Organizations have a general statement about obeying the laws of their respective nations. Freemasonry is not a monolithic movement. This point addresses a lot of the bizarre conspiracy theories that Masons control



the world or seek some kind of domination and they have a hidden agenda.

Masonic organizations are usually hierarchical with members advancing thorough a series of degrees or levels but there are multiple groups in just about every country and just about every state in the

United States. One of the things that characterize it are all sorts of squabbles and fights about things like recognition, differences in their doctrines, and even who should be admitted.

There is the equivalent of excommunication where one lodge withdraws recognition from another or declares a competing group to be clandestine but the bottom line is that no one group or individual speaks for all of Freemasonry. They may represent hundreds of different lodges or thousands of members, but from what I've found, there's always some other Masonic group operating within the same area or jurisdiction.

Freemasons don't worship the devil and generally they don't worship a specific sectarian deity. There are very vague references to what they call the Architect of the Universe, but this is rarely defined. One of the few things that most of the groups seem to agree on is that when the meeting is taking place there is a book called the VCL (Volume of Sacred Law) that is on a flat surface that is described as an altar. The book can be just about anything from a Bible to a Torah, or a Koran or book of Buddhist verse or even apparently a book containing blank pages. This is to recognize the diversity of belief or recognition of those who possess no religious views.

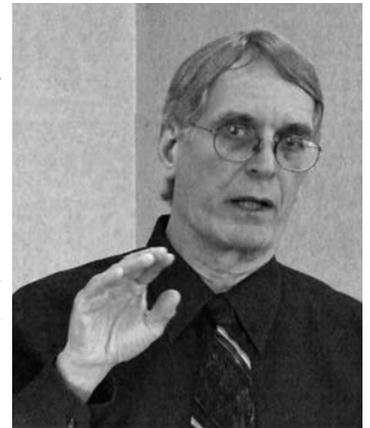
A Masonic lodge is not a church or temple, a mosque or some other



structure. The building may be patterned after the Temple of Solomon but it can be based on a Roman building or in a rented hall. The furniture and other items in a Masonic Lodge are arranged in a particular way. This all has a symbolic or allegorical meaning.

Defining Freemasonry is a daunting task because of its origins and history. Perhaps the best definition states that Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. In the 19th century the word *peculiar* was used as defining something special. This makes sense when you think of Freemasonry as a closed association. The Masonic Lodge is literally and figuratively closed to outsiders.

There are real boundaries as to what goes on inside the lodge and the wider general world. This does not mean that the members consider themselves better. It underscores one of the narratives found in Freemasonry which talks about moral uplift, improvements and making people better.



"Veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols," refers to the way in which Masonic ideas are transmitted and conveyed. Allegory comes from the Greek and is defined as a figurative mode of representation conveying a meaning other than the literal.

The Blue Lodge recognizes three basic degrees. These are known as Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. When you join a Masonic Lodge, you work your way through this progression. Each has its own rituals and you are said to have entered, passed and raised. Among the many misconceptions people have expressed about Freemasonry is that they are

guarding big secrets. It's easy to see where this comes from. They meet in closed lodges, they screen members, and most people have no idea of what goes on inside those rituals. A number of Christian evangelicals believe that the Masons indulge in devil worship and sinister activities are taking place inside the lodges.



If you want to find out what Freemasonry is all about you ought to ask about where it originated. There are a lot of exotic theories about the origins, some of them have come from Freemasons but most of them are highly questionable. Some have said the origins can be traced back to the Temple of Solomon or to ancient Egypt, but the bulk of the evidence suggests that the Masons borrowed some of their iconography from those times but their origins are much more recent, the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages most of the people worked the land and lived in some kind of feudal bondage. Craftsmen, these included wheelwrights, leatherworkers and anyone who had a trade were often organized into what were then called companies or guilds. The purposes here was to train men to some kind of standardized fashion and regulate the trade.

The stone masons were actually meant to do a lot more than just work with stone. They were masters of the general building trades, they had a wide knowledge of mechanics, they were job foremen and managed the job site and they traveled. They weren't bound to the land like the serfs. They didn't operate under a license from a feudal lord or local cleric. From the earliest days their's was probably the most technically demanding of the professions. Emperors relied on them for building everything from palaces to aqueducts. The Masonic Lodges seemed to have emerged from these guilds of stonemasons.

It is known that operative Masonic Lodges were beginning to admit gentlemen, aristocrats, scholars, merchants, and landowners by the 1600's. Men of this status represent this transition to speculative masonry. The emergence of Freemasonry was intellectually linked to the growth of experimental science and the discussion of natural philosophy. These were new ways of looking at how the universe operated. The bottom line is that the Freemasons were helping to organize what we know today as civil society, the Enlightenment, and the Age of Reason.

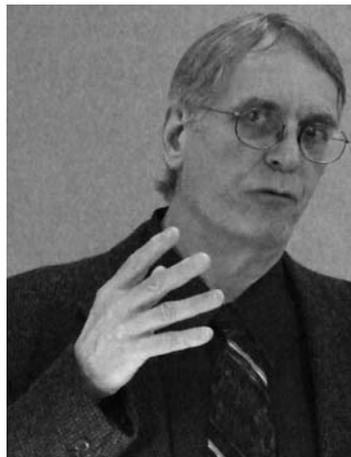
American Freemasonry is going to play a central role

in Dan Brown's new book so a little background is called for. Freemasonry came to America from Britain in 1717 and it thrived and grew along with immigration. Lodges were established first in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Georgia. Prominent Americans were initiated (e.g. Ben Franklin joined in 1731). Early masons often met in taverns, which didn't help either their behavior or their reputations. Other known masons included George Washington and Paul Revere; fourteen US Presidents have been Freemasons, often opposed by other Freemasons. American lodges have generally excluded Negroes. Hence the emergence of the segregated Prince Hall Lodges for African Americans.



Conrad passed out two handouts, a bibliography and an article from *Freethought History* #224, 1997.

– Reported by George Maurer☚



by the 1600's. Men of this status represent this transition to speculative masonry. The emergence of Freemasonry was intellectually linked to the growth of experimental science and the discussion of natural philosophy. These were new ways of looking at how the universe operated. The bottom line is

The Super Myth

“Let's see,” they said, “what can we do,
To keep them loyal, tried and true?”
We'll tell them that they have a soul,
That heaven is the final goal!
We must make sure they're scared of Hell.
Their bodies are but just a shell
That houses their eternal soul.
Safety comes only in control,
Along with fear, that we will feed,
A heavy dose of guilt they'll need.
Just those two things will guide the ship,
They'll flock to Christian fellowship.
Once folks are sure they have a soul
They'll be quite easy to control.
A genius thought concocters had,
The Super Myth is ironclad!

-- Dorothy B. Thompson



We now have our very own Lobbyists.

The Center for Inquiry is pleased to announce the official opening of a new Office of Public Policy in Washington, D.C. This initiative will mark an unprecedented drive to bring a rigorous defense of science and secular values to policy

makers located in the focal point of America's political and cultural battleground.

The Grand Opening of CFI Washington D.C. and the Office of Public Policy will take place from 4:30-8:00 p.m. on Tuesday November 14th at 621 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington D.C. following a press conference and panel discussion at the National Press Club. Students, faculty members, and off campus supporters are invited. Hors d'oeuvres will be served.

For more information please visit: <<http://www.cfidc.org>>

The Washington, D.C., Office of Public Policy Springs into Action!

By Ronald A. Lindsay

The Center for Inquiry's Office of Public Policy just opened its doors this summer and already has made significant contributions to law and public policy.

As you are aware, the Office of Public Policy (OPP) will concentrate on two main issues: science and secularism. With respect to the first issue, scientific research is constantly being undermined in any number of areas, such as by the opposition to stem cell research, denial of global warming, and advocacy of the teaching of intelligent design in science classes and abstinence in population-control policies. The OPP intends to defend the scientific outlook and the use of scientific methods in all relevant areas. It will forthrightly defend scientific naturalism, and it will attempt to make alliances with other groups seeking similar goals. On the second issue, the Religious Right exercises a powerful influence on both law and public policy. There are daily assaults on the First Amendment, from faith-based charities and vouchers to religious indoctrination in our prisons and military academies. The OPP will mount legal challenges where appropriate to defend our liberties under the Bill of Rights. Among other endeavors, the OPP will be lobbying members of Congress and other government

officials regarding specific legislation or regulations, preparing policy papers and conducting other nonpartisan analysis and research, and submitting *amicus* briefs in critical court cases.

The OPP hit the ground running in July with the publication of its first position paper, addressing the ethics of stem cell research. Shortly thereafter, the OPP filed an *amicus* brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, addressing the constitutionality of the Mt. Soledad cross, a monumental cross situated on public property outside of San Diego. Within a few weeks, another *amicus* brief will be filed in a court case in which the plaintiffs seek to prevent the State of Iowa from using Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship to "rehabilitate" prisoners by immersing them in religious doctrine. In the meantime, our lobbyists have been following and providing input on several important pieces of legislation.

Many people deplore the recent regressive policies in Washington, and they ask what they can do to further the view that America is a secular democracy. By monitoring congressional bills, the federal budget, and executive orders, the OPP will generate calls to Council members, asking them to contact their members of Congress and call on them to exhibit and advance reason, sound scientific policy, and the rule of law in their work. Our new public-policy initiative moves us from the realm of simply asking questions into the world of making a major, practical difference.

Ronald A Lindsay is Legal Director of the Center for Inquiry's Office of Public Policy in Washington, D.C.

Celebrate the inaugural public event of the CFI Office of Public Policy! Tuesday, November 14th, 2006. RSVP and information, contact: Toni Van Pelt at (202) 546-2330 .

Press conference, "Science and Secularism: Defending America's True Values," at the prestigious National Press Club and the Grand Opening of the Center for Inquiry/Washington, D.C., and the Office of Public Policy **PRESS CONFERENCE: \$69.00**

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, 21 November at 8:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers
2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
Cincinnati OH 45207; Phone: 513-396-8966

To see who's coming and to see more event details: http://atheists.meetup.com/90/calendar/5140742/t/cv1_ve



Washington, DC (8 November 2006)

On Tuesday, November 7, 2006, voters in Kansas sent a strong message when they placed control of the state Board of Education back in the hands of members who support teaching evolution. It is expected that the new Board will reverse a 2005 policy that permits

the teaching of intelligent design/creationism in public school science classes.

----- Another church scandal.

In Sicily sister Silvia Gomes De Sousa, 39, has been charged with threatening murder and with arson after allegedly setting fire to the house of the village priest in Roccalumera. And why? She stopped by the house where Fr. Carmelo Mantarro, 70, lives and "I just flipped when I came to the house and caught him in bed with another woman who is married," she testified in a court proceeding. "We had been together four years and I had even had two abortions because of him." (London Daily Mail)

Anti-abortion protestor David Robert McMenemy, 45, scoured the Midwest looking for an abortion clinic when he found a women's clinic in Davenport, Iowa, federal prosecutors say. There, the Michigan resident drove his car through the front of the clinic, doused it with gasoline and set it on fire. McMenemy intended his actions would stop or disrupt the clinic's activities and save some unborn babies lives, federal indictment papers note. There was just one problem with his plan: the clinic does not perform abortions, but rather offers pre-natal care to poor women. "We think he intended for it to be a suicide but he found out burning would be too painful," said the county prosecutor. The clinic suffered about \$170,000 in damage and was closed for weeks.

(Davenport Quad-City Times)

We are just getting used to "genetically modified," now comes cloned.

According to Rick Weiss in the *Washington Post*, the Food an Drug Administration is about to approve the sale of meat and milk from cloned livestock. The FDA is responsible only for the question of human safety. Too much animal fat in the diet is dangerous, but no more so if it comes from clones.

If there is no rational downside to an innovation we can always count on religion to discover supernatural objections. Some Jews, for example, worry that the Talmudic injunction against crossbreeding might forbid cloning, but a clone seems to go in the direction of species purity rather than a chimera. Christians are more likely to see the sin of pride in cloning. That is not unlike the Muslim concern that it might infringe on Allah's prerogative as creator, but maybe it's a gift from Allah instead. Buddhists seem to think it's OK if the motive is to reduce suffering, but how do the souls get shared? Hindus don't eat animals anyway.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 20 October 2006

The curriculum committee at Harvard proposes Reason and Faith. The world is riven by religious war. It always has been. We live now in an age of science, but it is ancient, unfounded religious beliefs that are central to national disputes over the teaching of evolution, stem cell research, abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. A Harvard curriculum committee has therefore recommended that every Harvard student be required to take one course on the interplay between religion and science. It must be framed in the context of social issues. This seems certain to influence other universities. Scientists had better start getting involved before the zealots take over.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 27 October 2006

Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday where conflicts with holidays occur as noted below

Nov 19 (third Sunday)- *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's outrageous legacy:* Kip Thorne

Dec 17 (third Sunday) - *Science of Aliens:* Clifford Pickover

- Bryan Sellers





How the Non-Religious Can Deal With Religion on the Holidays

Suggestions by Nathan Bupp, Center for Inquiry

Amherst, NY (December 14, 2005)—A significant portion of the US population is non-religious. According to a 2001 City University of New York survey (ARIS 2001), 14 percent of adults polled defined themselves as “secular” when asked about their religious outlook, and a recent Pew Forum on Religion and Life found that 16 percent have “no religious affiliation.” This amounts to some 30 million Americans.

In the midst of the holiday season, how do the millions of us who have no religious beliefs or affiliations deal with religion during the holidays? What should a nonbeliever do when other family members say grace or give a blessing? What if a nonbeliever is asked to lead the family in grace? How should one celebrate the holidays with family and friends while being true to one’s non-religious views? What should a parent do if the subject of religion comes up at school?

Here are some secular suggestions that the Council for Secular Humanism has compiled from the input of agnostics, humanists, and skeptics in religion:

1) Being non-religious does not mean you have to play the part of the Scrooge.

Even if you don’t share religious beliefs with family and friends, you can still socially participate in the holidays and enjoy the season as a special occasion to celebrate and correspond with friends and family. Send non-religious holiday cards to the people you care about. Give presents in the spirit of simply being nice.

2) Live and let live: don’t make your beliefs an issue-unless someone else makes them an issue.

This depends on the situation. Many nonbelievers find that family and friends are open to friendly debates about the existence of God and meaning of life, but if you think these topics will ruin a holiday get-together by spawning conflict, let sleeping dogs lie. However, this advice doesn’t mean that atheists, agnostics and skeptics should make themselves punching bags for family friends and relatives who want to engage in a mean-spirited argument. Be assertive and defend your views if attacked, but never make yourself the one responsible for ruining the holidays by leading an offensive.

3) If you’re asked to lead or participate in prayer, respectfully decline or suggest an alternative.

If someone asks you to “do the honors,” respectfully decline and allow someone else to lead the prayer. If anyone asks about your refusal, simply tell them that you’re not a believer and suggest that the best person to say grace or lead the family in prayer is someone who can do it sincerely. You might also encourage a silent “grace” or moment of reflection at the holiday dinner table. Those

who want to pray can do so silently; you can use the moment for secular reflection.

4) Make an occasion to celebrate on your terms.

Would you like the holidays to be secular? Take the lead and organize your own celebrations with friends and family. They can be on Christmas Day or any other day, as the Human Light people do. Some people—many people—don’t want to give up the traditional meal on the traditional day, but would like to dispense with the religious trappings. After all, sharing with friends and family is what really counts in life.

5) Give and volunteer.

Contrary to widespread belief, religious people and organizations don’t own the concept of charity. Be active as a donor or volunteer during the holidays to remind others—and yourself—that being caring and generous does not require religious belief.

6) How should you to handle religion and Christmas mythology as atheist and agnostic parents?

Religion at school:

Views vary on exactly where parents ought to draw the line when their children are exposed to religious beliefs they don’t hold. As a general rule of thumb, the question is whether your children are being taught about other people’s religious beliefs to make them aware of the cultures and traditions of others or they are being pressured to participate in religious activities and affirmations of faith. Decorating a Christmas tree, spinning a dreidel, or learning about Ramadan probably won’t impinge on your rights to raise your child to be non-religious. In fact, the questions that your children will raise after learning about the religious beliefs of others will give you an opportunity to talk with them about what you do or do not believe in and why.

If you’re going to protest or intervene in

traditional school activities, consider bringing it up with school officials after the holiday, to make a difference for next year. If possible, avoid putting yourself and your child in the position of forcing the last-minute cancellation of an event that other children have been looking forward to. If, however, you feel that your child is clearly being indoctrinated or compelled to participate in an overt religious activity, it’s your right to protest or intervene immediately.

Santa, Elves and Magical Flying Reindeer

Lighten up about the lighter aspects of the Christmas mythology. Your child’s future rationalism won’t go like smoke up the chimney if they expect Santa to come down the chimney. Don’t make the mistake of trying to impose totally rational explanations on young children. One agnostic whose entire family is composed of atheists, pantheists, and ethical culturists was astonished when his 3-year-old grandson began cry in front of the fireplace at a family gathering on Christmas Eve. No one could get him to stop crying or to figure out why he was doing it. Finally, he wailed one word, “Santa.” Then they realized that he was worried that Santa was going to burn when he came down the chimney. Even though his parents had never told him about Santa, the fat man in red suit, of course, at every mall, on TV, and probably the talk of all the children he had interaction with. The grandfather threw water on the fire and told his grandson that they wouldn’t have a fire again until Santa had come and gone. Did he put his 3-year-old on the path of a lifetime of superstition? No. It’s okay to indulge a little childhood fantasy.

The Council for Secular Humanism is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization promoting rational inquiry, secular values, and positive human development through the advancement of secular humanism. The Council, publisher of the bimonthly journal *Free Inquiry*, has a Web site at <www.secularhumanism.org>. ☚



USA: How a state funded healthcare program turned into a global crusade

The powerful Christian Right in the USA has taken control of the government's flagship program to combat AIDS worldwide. Under their influence, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that commands a five-year budget of \$ 15 billion, is being misused for a crusade for conservative Christian values instead for fighting the disease.

The PEPFAR was launched in January 2003. Initially, the reputable world help organization CARE was the government's contract partner for the fight against AIDS in Africa and Asia. CARE was to distribute \$ 50 million over two years in competitive grants to suitable subcontractors and to oversee their work. But the CARE-contract was a thorn in the flesh of the Christian Right. In their eyes, CARE committed two cardinal sins: Though they tried to cooperate with President Bush's "faith-based initiative" and distributed a major part of the grants to religious organizations, they insisted that all grantees - secular or religious - should technically qualify for the entrusted work. The Christian Right would have preferred to see that the grant money was exclusively and unconditionally distributed within their ideological and political circles. CARE's second sin was to promote the use of condoms to prevent AIDS infection. This was in accordance with the earlier policy of the US government, but against the agenda of the Christian crusaders for sexual abstinence as the only way of AIDS prevention. Under their pressure, the official government policy shifted with the launching of the PEPFAR in 2003 from recommending condom use to promoting "abstinence, faithfulness, and, when appropriate, condoms". But this was still not enough of a concession. Meantime, condoms are - unofficially - banned and everybody considering them useful is eliminated from the program.

This year, the propagandists of Christian morality launched a furious campaign against CARE, accusing the organization of being "anti-American" and "promoting prostitution and drug use". The US government obliged. After all, the smear campaign was led by President Bush's strongest supporters. Among them James Dobson, one of the commanders of the Christian Right and head of the organization Focus on the Family sent out 5 million letters and e-mails to support Bush's reelection in 2004.

The CARE contract was discontinued and replaced by a \$ 200 million program that aims at Christian groups subscribing to the abstinence-line. The new program is overseen by the government agency USAID. Under the guidance of the White House's "Faith-based office", USAID had been cleansed of "secular elements" and put under a politically reliable and strongly evangelical administration that obeys the directives of their political bosses and distributed grants to all the politically correct recipients.

In 2003, Congress passed and President Bush signed a law that has meantime been declared unconstitutional by several courts, but still stands. It makes it obligatory for any US-based group receiving anti-AIDS funds to sign a pledge that binds them to adopt an anti-prostitution policy. Several recipients of USAID grants are successfully educating prostitutes and seeking their cooperation in preventing HIV infection. Some of them refused to sign the pledge and lost their grants. Victim of the pledge is for example the American Jewish World Service, one of a very few faith-based, but non-Christian recipients, included under the CARE program. The AJWS tries to stop the spread of AIDS by providing education opportunities for children of prostitutes in Kenya, which can help mothers leave the brothels. The Brazilian government lost a \$ 40 million grant. Brazil is running a very successful anti-AIDS program that has kept the infection rate among young adults under 1 percent. Pedro Chequer, national director of the program, gives the credit to the fact that the program includes prostitutes as essential partners in its HIV prevention efforts. In an affidavit in a lawsuit over the matter, he said his country strived to adhere to "the established principles of the scientific method and not allow theological beliefs and dogma to interfere."

The Way Eve Tells It . . .

After three weeks in the Garden of Eden, God came to visit Eve.

"So, how is everything going?" asked God. "It's all so beautiful, God," Eve replied. "The sunrises and sunsets are breathtaking, the smells, the sights -- everything is so wonderful; but I have just one problem. It's these breasts you have given me. The middle one pushes the other two out and I am constantly knocking them with my arms, catching them on branches and snagging them on bushes. They're a real pain," reported Eve. She went on to tell God that, since many other parts of her body came in pairs, such as her limbs, eyes, ears, etc., she felt that having only two breasts might leave her body more "symmetrically balanced".

"That's a fair point," replied God. "But it was my first shot at this, you know. I gave the animals six teats, so I figured you needed only half of those, but I see that you are right. I will fix it up right away." And God reached down, removed the middle breast and tossed it into the bushes.

Three weeks passed and God once again visited Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Well, Eve, how is my favorite creation?" "Just fantastic," she replied, "except for one oversight. You see, all the animals are paired off. The ewe has a ram and the cow has a bull. All the animals have a mate except me. I feel so alone."

God thought for a minute, and said, "You know, Eve, you are right. How could I have overlooked this? You do need a mate and I will immediately create a man from a part of you. Now, let's see ... where did I put that useless boob?"

Now doesn't that make more sense than that myth about a rib?



Things CNN Will Never Tell You About Religion

By R. Joseph Hoffmann

1. That there is no God.
2. That you will not live forever.
3. That Noah's ark will never be found because it never existed.
4. That Christianity began as a violent first century messianic sect which learned to cope peaceably when its messiah didn't show up.
5. That most fundamentalists are rather stupid, Muslims and Christians alike.
6. That most evangelical Christians cannot describe what they mean by "inerrant" - speaking of the Bible.
7. That the vast majority of Christians opposed to stem cell research think it means killing babies for their brains.
8. That biblical Israel ceased to exist in 720 BC, lasted for less than two hundred years, and that modern Israel didn't exist again until 1948.
9. That virtually no Jews use the phrase 'Judaean-Christian,' applied to ethics or anything else.
10. That Muhammad, a delusional seventh century Arab who thought the God of the Jews was speaking to him, was not a Muslim.
11. That Jesus, a delusional first century Jew who, if he existed, thought that the God of Abraham was his father, was not a Christian.
12. That most Arabs don't like Palestinians.
13. That religion is the cause and not the cure for Middle Eastern violence.
14. That most Lebanese who are not Shi'a would rather be called Phoenicians than Arabs.
15. That the intellectual tradition in Arabia that is supposed to have given us everything from astronomy to the zero and algebra...didn't.
16. That not all religions are about peace, love and brotherhood—specifically, that the word Islam does not derive from the Arabic word peace but from the term for "Give up?"
17. That the term *Jihad* historically has never meant an inner struggle for spiritual perfection but killing the enemies of Islam before they can hurt you.
18. That almost no one in the Middle East believes that the future of the Middle East resides with "moderate" Muslims.
19. That atheism, secular humanism, and agnosticism are essential ingredients of the pluralist culture of modern Europe and America.

20. That when secularism and humanism fail, democracy fails.
21. That religious tolerance is not possible in the Middle East.
22. That unless the phrase 'freedom and democracy' includes the construct 'secular' neither term is meaningful.
23. That prior to the war on Iraq, the American president did not know that Iraq was biblical Mesopotamia, Eden.
24. That the American President thinks the distinction between Shi'a and Sunni is similar the distinction between Methodist and Presbyterian.
25. That the new 'democratic' regime in Iraq - Iraqi Shi'a - and not Syria or Iran, were the staunchest supporters of Hezbollah prior to the invasion of Iraq.
26. That this means that the people we are calling the bulwark of freedom and democracy in Iraq are the terrorists of southern Lebanon.

R. Joseph Hoffmann is currently senior fellow and Chair of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion, at the Center for Inquiry, Amherst, New York. From 2000 until the outbreak of the war against Iraq, he was Professor of Civilization Studies at the American University Of Beirut.

The Religion and Faith of Preacher Ted Haggard

Quotes from "Soldiers of Christ" by Jeff Sharlet in *Harpers* (May 2005)

In Pastor Ted's book *Dog Training, Fly Fishing, & Sharing Christ in the 21st Century*, he describes the church he thinks good Christians want. "I want my finances in order, my kids trained, and my wife to love life. I want good friends who are a delight and who provide protection for my family and me should life become difficult someday . . . I don't want surprises, scandals, or secrets . . . I want stability and, at the same time, steady, forward movement. I want the church to help me live life well, not exhaust me with endless 'worthwhile' projects." By "worthwhile projects" Ted means building funds and soup kitchens alike. It's not that he opposes these; it's just that he is sick of hearing about them and believes that other Christians are, too. He knows that for Christianity to prosper in the free market, it needs more than "moral values"—it needs customer value.

New Lifers, Pastor Ted writes with evident pride, "like the benefits, risks, and maybe above all, the excitement of a free-market society."

And that is why he believes spiritual war requires a virile, worldly counterpart. "I teach a strong ideology of the use of power," he says, "of military might, as a public service." He is for preemptive war, because he believes the Bible's exhortations against sin set for us a preemptive paradigm, and he is for ferocious war, because "the Bible's bloody. There's a lot about blood."



Bad reasons to be good

By Sam Harris; 22 October 2006; ©Copyright 2006 Globe Newspaper Company.

The Midterm elections are fast approaching, and their outcome could well be determined by the “moral values” of conservative Christians. While this possibility is regularly bemoaned by liberals, the link between religion and morality in our public life is almost never questioned. One of the most common justifications one hears for religious faith, from all points on the political spectrum, is that it provides a necessary framework for moral behavior. Most Americans appear to believe that without faith in God, we would have no durable reasons to treat one another well. The political version of this morality claim is that our country was founded on “Judeo-Christian principles,” the implication being that without these principles we would have no way to write just laws.

It is, of course, taboo to criticize a person’s religious beliefs. The problem, however, is that much of what people believe in the name of religion is intrinsically divisive, unreasonable, and incompatible with genuine morality. The truth is that the only rational basis for morality is a concern for the happiness and suffering of other conscious beings. This emphasis on the happiness and suffering of others explains why we don’t have moral obligations toward rocks. It also explains why (generally speaking) people deserve greater moral concern than animals, and why certain animals concern us more than others. If we show more sensitivity to the experience of chimpanzees than to the experience of crickets, we do so because there is a relationship between the size and complexity of a creature’s brain and its experience of the world.

Unfortunately, religion tends to separate questions of morality from the living reality of human and animal suffering. Consequently, religious people often devote immense energy to so-called “moral” questions -- such as gay marriage -- where no real suffering is at issue, and they will inflict terrible suffering in the service of their religious beliefs.

Consider the suffering of the millions of unfortunate people who happen to live in sub-Saharan Africa. The wars in this part of the world are interminable. AIDS is epidemic there, killing around 3 million people each year. It is almost impossible to exaggerate how bad your luck is if you are born today in a country like Sudan. The question is, how does religion affect this problem?

Many pious Christians go to countries like Sudan to help alleviate human suffering, and such behavior is regularly put forward as a defense of Christianity. But in this case, religion gives people bad reasons for acting morally, where good reasons are actually available. We don’t have to believe that a deity wrote one of our books, or that Jesus was born of a virgin, to be moved to help people in need. In those same desperate places, one finds secular volunteers working with organizations like Doctors Without Borders and helping people for secular reasons. Helping people purely out of concern for their happiness and suffering seems rather more noble than helping them because you think the Creator of the universe wants you to do it, will reward you for doing it, or will punish you for not doing it.

But the worst problem with religious morality is that it often causes good people to act immorally, even while they attempt to alleviate the suffering of others. In Africa, for instance, certain Christians preach against condom use in villages where AIDS is epidemic, and where the only information about condoms comes from the ministry. They also preach the necessity of believing in the divinity of Jesus Christ in places where religious conflict between Christians and Muslims has led to the deaths of millions. Secular volunteers don’t spread ignorance and death in this way. A person need not be evil to preach against condom use in a village decimated by AIDS; he or she need only believe a specific faith-based moral dogma. In such cases we can see

that religion can cause good people to do fewer good deeds than they might otherwise.

We have to realize that we decide what is good in our religious doctrines. We read the Golden Rule, for instance, and judge it to be a brilliant distillation of many of our ethical impulses. And then we come across another of God’s teachings on morality: If a man discovers that his bride is not a virgin on their wedding night, he must stone her to death on her father’s doorstep (Deuteronomy 22: 13-21). If we are civilized, we will reject this as utter lunacy. Doing so requires that we exercise our own moral intuitions, keeping the real issue of human happiness in view. The belief that the Bible is the word of God is of no help to us whatsoever.

As we consider how to run our own society and how to help people in need, the choice before us is simple: Either we can have a 21st-century conversation about morality and human happiness -- availing ourselves of all the scientific insights and philosophical arguments that have accumulated in the last 2,000 years of human discourse -- or we can confine ourselves to an Iron Age conversation as it is preserved in our holy books.

Wherever the issue of “moral values” surfaces in our national conversation in the coming weeks, ask yourself which approach to morality is operating. Are we talking about how to best alleviate human suffering? Or are we talking about the whims of an invisible God?

Sam Harris is the author of *Letter to a Christian Nation* and *The End of Faith*. He can be reached through his website, <samharris.org>



Why Truth Matters

Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom
(London: Continuum, 2006)

Does this proposition need argument? Of course truth is important, is there even a question? So the authors devote the first chapter to the objections to truth. What is truth and how do we know it? We can only apprehend the world through our senses, and we know our senses deceive us. We experience the world as solid matter, but physics tells us it consists mostly of empty space between molecules, which themselves vibrate incessantly; and we experience these vibrations as heat. We think of air as “empty space,” yet know we can not do for ten minutes without breathing it. It was only in the nineteenth century that air was identified as a mixture of gases, only one of which sustains life. So philosophers argue we can never know reality with absolute certainty (p. 42). But nobody really believes these doctrines of philosophical scepticism. Experience will not allow us to doubt “that there are real, foundational truths about the world” (p. 43).

We get our truths from science in a profoundly hierarchical and undemocratic process. Regardless of what we think and wish, the earth is warming, AIDS is an infectious disease, and nuclear bombs explode. Moreover, for much of the past three centuries, science has been the privilege of an elite of European white men. Science has been a source of power and authority, a means of oppressing much of the world in the age of imperialism. Why should these men be believed. Postmodern radicalism asserts the truth value of other, oppressed peoples, of ethnic minorities, of the third world, and especially of women. Why should truth not be determined by majority opinion? Or, why should it only be determined by majority opinion of scientists, and who counts as a scientist anyway.

Science has gone wrong many times. In the early twentieth century biological “race” was thought to be all important. Leading scientists and thinkers supported the idea that humanity could be improved by right breeding like livestock, and eugenics was widely advocated. After the German Nazis showed were this thinking ultimately

leads, heredity and race was purged from science as if man had ceased to be an animal. By the nineteen fifties biological theories of human behavior had lost support in mainstream science. In the Soviet Union Lysenkoist ideology resulted in the suppression of all genetics in favor of a doctrine linked to the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

Commitment to scriptural “truth” requires the rejection not only of biological evolution, but also of geological ages, linguistic history, and for that matter much of what we know about human history. Believers create contortions purporting to show how the fossil record supports Biblical literalism, and make desperate efforts to prove a complex world could only be designed by a superior god. “There is something troubling about people’s almost childish desire to reconstruct the world imaginatively so that it fits with their wider beliefs and values.”(p. 105)

When we come to the social sciences of human activities and history many questions about the very possibility of truth can be raised. There are many professions which can be indifferent to truth. Advertising and marketing are among these, so are fashion and entertainment. Indeed in much of the economy fantasy and wishful thinking are promoted. Certain aspects of the practice of the law can be indifferent to truth, having to concentrate on winning arguments.

Human activities are so multifarious and complex that social scientists’ interpretation of the facts may differ widely, even among academics who have examined the same data. There may be little agreement among historians about the interpretation of the past. Are events controlled by major actors, – the famous men hypothesis advocated by scholars known as “intentionalists;” or should history be considered the result of all people in society in a flow of “tendencies”? Social scientists will agree to differ on interpretations, but they will insist that the facts must be truthfully represented and may not be altered. At issue is which selection of facts are important and how are they to be viewed. Truth does matter in understanding human actions, as much as understanding the actions of nature.

In this book the authors answer the contortions and irrationalisms of the religionists and post-modernists with the clarity of a woodland brook. A must reading for the confused.

– Wolf Roder ☘



December Pollock:
*No Potluck - Enjoy time with friends
 and family!*



November Meeting:
 Tuesday, November 28, 2006
 7:00 PM



FIG Leaves
 P.O. Box 19034
 Cincinnati, OH 45219

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 figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.