

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 11

November 2009

November FIG Meeting: **Note Time Changes!**

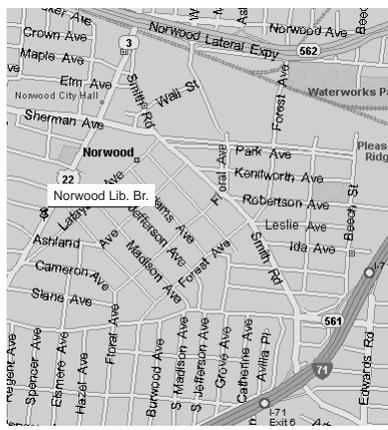
Thursday, 19 November 2009 at 6:30 PM

Where: The Norwood branch Public Library, 4325 Montgomery Rd. This is south of the Norwood lateral and north of I-71

Meet & Greet - Who Are We?

Open Mike

It will be an “open mike” format where members of FIG can talk for a few minutes to let new members know what FIG is all about. Speakers are being drafted for this. You may volunteer. The short talks will be followed by a meet and greet for new members. We may carry the meeting over to a local restaurant since library closes at 8:00 PM.



December FIG Meeting:

When: Tuesday 15 December 2009 at 7:00 pm

Where: The Hannaford Suites Hotel, 5900 E. Galbraith Rd. This is immediately west of I-71. Take Exit 12 onto Montgomery Rd.

What’s So “New” About “The New Atheism”?

Speaker: Tim Madigan

In the past few years several books on atheism, by such authors as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Victor Stenger, John Allen Paulos and Daniel C. Dennett, have become best-sellers, and have sparked what has been called ‘The New Atheism’ movement. In this talk, Tim Madigan will discuss some of the reasons for this unexpected surge of disbelief, and what, if anything, is *new* about the new atheism, as well as the relevance this might have for organized humanism. Tim would be well primed for this topic since he is editing a series of articles on this subject for *Philosophy Now* magazine.

Timothy J. Madigan (Rochester, NY) is an assistant professor of philosophy at St. John Fisher College and a member of the editorial board of *Philosophy Now* magazine. For many years he was editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine.



Inside

Page

October Meeting	2
Things To Do, Things To See.....	4
Science Book Club.....	4
Letters to the Editor	5
In the News	6
Godless Billboard.....	7
CFI Celebrant Training	9
Short Book Reviews	
<i>From Hell: Thirteen Goolish</i>	
<i>Poems for Halloween</i>	
by Tim Kelly	10
<i>From the Conclusion of the Good Book</i>	
by David Plotz	10
<i>Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing The</i>	
<i>Hidden Contracticions In The Bible</i>	
<i>(And Why We Don't Know About</i>	
<i>Them)</i> by Bart D. Ehrman Book	
Review by Wolf Roder.....	11

Events

November Meeting

6:30 PM, Thursday Nov. 19, 2009
Norwood Branch Public
Library, 4325 Montgomery Rd.

December Potluck

*No potuck is scheduled.
Enjoy time with your
friends & family.*

December Meeting

7:00 PM, Tuesday Dec. 15, 2009
Hannaford Suites Hotel,
5900 E. Galbraith Rd.

We are still searching for a permanent location and don't have dates or times to report until we make more headway on that front. If you have any ideas/suggestions, please contact John Welte or Shawn Jeffers.



October Meeting

The Demographics of Unbelief

Tom Flynn, Executive Director for the Council of Secular Humanism and Senior Editor of Free Inquiry Magazine, gave an interesting, informative, and at times humorous talk on the statistics regarding non-theism. He delved deeply into results of polls on religious belief. These poll results are often quoted in the media without this in-depth analysis that was provided by Mr. Flynn.



So, who are these unbelievers and how many of them are there? One thing the religious and non-religious agree on is that these non-believers are a small, marginal minority in this country. This is not the case. Much was made of a Gallop Poll in August 2000 that said that less people would vote for an atheist presidential candidate than would vote for a woman, a Jew, an African-American, or a gay or lesbian. Mr. Flynn pointed out that of the poll respondents, 49 percent said they would vote for an atheist candidate, the most since Gallop started asking that question in the fifties and barely a minority. That result was not reported widely in the media, if at all.

The non-superstitious and rational people of past populations, going all the way back to ancient Greece, have been a small minority of the populations. But these groups, who had to work in much more hostile environments than we do today, accounted for a sizable portion of the “enduring accomplishments in which humanity takes pride.” We seem to influence our societies far out of proportion to our numbers.

Mr. Flynn pointed out that the numbers of those who say they are not affiliated with any religion have risen greatly over the past one hundred years with a precipitous climb in the most recent polls. These numbers reflect a wide range of non-theists, from atheists to “spiritual but not religious.” Probably about two thirds are atheists and secular humanists. There are more people like us than ever before. There are more non-religious than Hispanic Americans, or African-Americans, or Jewish people. It is estimated that forty nine million people in the United States are non-religious.



Most pollsters are intent on counting the religious. The results of religious attendance polls can help to predict election results. Those who attend church regularly tend to vote Republican at a rate of two to one. Those who don't attend church regularly tend to vote Democrat two to one. The non-religious are often ignored in these attendance polls.

One of the most important points made in the talk was this. A large factor in determining the results of these polls has to do with the way the questions are asked. For instance, Gallop started asking if people believed in God or a universal spirit in 1976. This was a change from their previous question: “do you believe in God?” The results were presented as a continuous data stream



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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Memberships run from:

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 One year: \$25
 Family: \$35

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.



that qualified respondents as believers. As a result, the demographic remained at a level of belief of ninety percent. The many and varied definitions of what god is considered to be also skew poll results. As Mr. Flynn said, "read the fine print." The variations in the wording of



these polls often make it hard to determine the numbers of non-believers.

The results of the polls are also used to support different ideas. The religious like to point to the polls that say

that scientists are more atheistic than the general population. They can then imply to their followers that scientists should not be trusted, especially when it comes to subjects like evolution, because they do not believe in God. Secular humanists, on the other hand, point to the same figures and say, "Smarter people have no God belief."

Since the year 2000 the number who claim no religious affiliation or "none" when asked what religion they support has risen dramatically to around sixteen percent, or forty nine million. According to a poll conducted by PEW in 2004, the breakdown of "nones" is as follows: twenty percent,

or 3.2 percent of the total population, identify themselves as atheist or agnostic. Forty seven percent of the unaffiliated, or 7.5 percent of the total population, identify themselves as hard seculars, effectively atheists who preferred another label.



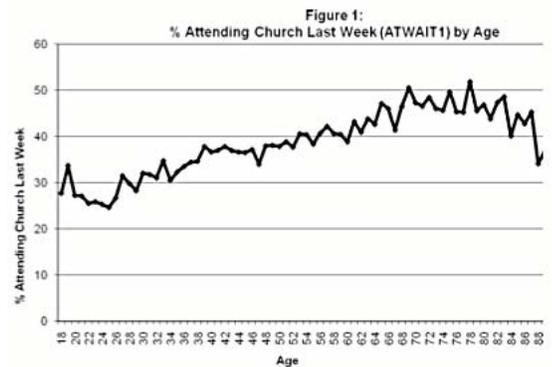
Thirty three percent of the unaffiliated or 5.5 percent of the total population identify themselves as believers, spiritual but not religious. That is a total of ten percent of the population identifying themselves as atheists and

secularists. That is about thirty seven million people. Subsequent polls have verified these results.

Polls also indicate that the number of "nones" in the 18-25 age group is growing significantly, twenty percent as compared to ten percent in the late 1980's. Only thirty two percent attend church regularly. They also accept the theory of evolution at a two to one ratio. The majority of the general population of the U.S. rejects the theory of evolution.

Baylor University, the largest Baptist University has released results from several polls that are highly flawed.

The design of the study caused the over counting of evangelicals and the under counting of everyone else to the extent



that Free Inquiry Magazine declared the Baylor study useless. Baylor studies have used questionable methods such as data manipulation to get the results they desired. Once again, it is essential to read the fine print to see who is being asked the questions and how the questions are written. In this case, who is asking the questions is a factor. An exception is the Barna Group, an evangelical organization whose recent surveys are reliable in their results.

An interesting point was made about the responses of people who were asked by Gallup if they attend church regularly. The number who said they attended the preceding week was forty percent of Americans, more people than all the churches in the country can seat. Obviously many people are lying about church attendance, probably hoping to be seen as better Christians. It is estimated that church attendance is about half of that forty percent.

In conclusion, it is evident that secularism is growing worldwide. More people are leaving the religions of their parents to lead secular lives. Secularism has grown principally through the mechanism of choice. Religions are on the decline as people in today's world examine and reject their dogmas.

Reported by John Welte





THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Hear! Hear! *Answers in Atheism* at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time. Please tune in at www.answersinatheism.net.

The Answers in Atheism crew

2009 SCIENCE BOOK CLUB Schedule

All meetings will be on the 3rd Sunday every month.

Meetings at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library, Room 3A at 2:30 pm.

Nov 15 - *God, the Failed Hypothesis* by Victor Stenger

Dec 20 - *Origins of Creativity* by Karl Pfenninger & Valerie Shubik



The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

(NOTE: 3 meetings)

What: Renee's Birthday Bash!

When: November 14, 2009 3:00 PM

Where: Roxx Coffeehouse & Games; 6745 Cornell Road (corner of Cornell & Deerfield Rds.); Blue Ash, OH 45242513-297-1260

It's that time of year! Fellow Atheists Meetup Group member, ReneeA, is having her Annual Birthday Bash on Saturday, November 14, at Roxx Coffeehouse & Games, 6745 Cornell Road (corner of Cornell & Deerfield Rds.), Blue Ash, OH 45242, Phone #: 513-297-1260.

Please join me for a full day and evening of board-games, music, food, and fun! We start the adventure at 3:00pm, and go until the wee hours of the morning -- but feel free to come and go as fits your schedule!

Bring your games, your instruments, your ears, and your appetites! Roxx will be selling personal pizzas, pretzels, nachos and cheese, cookies, muffins, pop, juice, smoothies, and the best coffee and tea you've ever tasted (or close to it). I will provide the cake!

If you like, you can bring in extra chairs or tables. But the most important thing to bring is yourself!

Learn more here: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnati-atheists/calendar/11675063/>

What: The Cincinnati Atheists November Meetup

When: Monday, November 16, 2009 6:30 PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers; 2692 Madison Road Rookwood Pavilion; Cincinnati OH 45208(513) 396-8960

Meetup Description

6:30 - 9:00 **Please note earlier time**

The bookstore is now closing at 9 PM, so we've

shifted the meeting a bit.

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

This is a purely social gathering. No agenda, no speaker, no rules of order. If you'd prefer a bit more structure, please check the calendar for lectures, FIG meetings, and other events.

To find us: Go in the front doors of the bookstore and turn left. Enter the Bistro and walk straight back as far as you can go. We're all freethinkers, so we'll look just like you.

The Bistro has a full menu, including vegetarian options. If you like, enjoy dinner, dessert, tea, or a brewski. Restaurant direct line: 513.396.8970 The Bookstore / Bistro is not associated with this meetup group, and will not be able to answer questions. Please use our Message Board to connect with fellow group members.

Announcing a new Meetup for The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: Skeptics in the Pub Crawl Mainstrasse

When: December 4, 2009 7:00 PM

Where: Mainstrasse Village; Sixth and Main ; Covington, KY 41011.

Cincinnati's first ever Skeptics in the Pub! Calling all those based in reality. We will be doing a pub crawl on Friday December 4 in Mainstrasse Village. Good times, good food, good beer. More information to come as group size may cause some rethinking.

Learn more here: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnati-atheists/calendar/11793261/>



Letters To The Editor



The Washington Post

Letter: Herb Silverman; Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston and Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America.

Quality Of Life Panels

Q: Does end-of-life care prolong life or does it prolong suffering? Should it be a part of health-care reform?

A few years ago, there was a license plate war in my home state of South Carolina. The legislature wanted to authorize our department of motor vehicles to distribute, at no additional cost, license plates with the anti-abortion motto "Choose Life." When Planned Parenthood objected, a state representative from my county suggested that the organization sponsor a "Choose Death" plate. This representative is one of the many political buffoons who help make South Carolina fodder for late-night comedians. But, unlike license plates, when it comes to end-of-life decisions, choosing death can sometimes be a good idea.

Patients and their families who seek information about death should certainly be provided with available options so they can make informed decisions. But I would also like doctors to make this information routinely available, whether requested or not. Some patients are ignorant or afraid to bring up these kinds of unpleasant matters. Contrary to the cliché, ignorance at such a time is almost never bliss.

We've come a long way from the accepted ignorance of my childhood, when doctors would decide how much, or even whether to tell patients about their illnesses. When I was ten years old, I remember periodic visits to a very sick aunt who continued to get sicker. On each visit, the family would tell her how wonderful she looked and that she would get better soon--even when she was bedridden in obvious pain and could barely speak. Only after she died did anyone mention the dreaded C-word, cancer. Despite the family's good intentions, I expect my aunt would have preferred her loved ones to communicate more honestly in her last six months. She might even have wanted those last six months shortened to three. But we'll never know.

Today's controversy didn't exist 1000 years ago, when most believed that the terminally ill were in "God's hands." With scientific breakthroughs, the terminally ill are often in technology's hands, and it's up to humans to decide the extent to which that technology should be used. For me, the bottom line is about the quality of life, not just the length of life. Regardless of age, if a very ill person has a chance to recover and live a life with quality, then by all means go for

it. However, if it is clear to medical experts that only technical life can be prolonged, without hope for recovery, then I would put no more money into it.

Given the limited resources our government is willing to spend, I would concede that making such judgments requires that we ration health care. If such re-allocation of resources can transform a few very expensive essentially brain dead weeks into a combined hundred years for others, I would call it rational rationing.

By Herb Silverman | November 3, 2009

We're All Stereotypes

A lawyer friend once told me the following lawyer joke: "It's just those 98% of lawyers that give the rest of us a bad name." On the other hand, well over 95% of the lawyers I know are among those remaining 2%. Of course, my experience may be statistically skewed because most of them generously donate their time and energy to non-profit organizations I support.

The question at hand is whether and how to stereotype. We all fit neatly into countless categories, as we recognize when filling out census forms. And I think we all, more or less, are prone to stereotyping others. Absent any additional information, I'm more likely to trust a lawyer who works for a non-profit than one who specializes in corporate takeovers; to believe math professors rather than religious leaders; to expect my students who sit near the front to do better than those in the back. Though these stereotypes may be based on my personal experiences, I know I need to be especially careful not to let them cloud my judgment about individuals.

Each of us is a minority in some way. It might be because of race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other trait by which we may be regarded as different. Each of us is also part of some majority. It is when we wear our majority hats that we need to be most mindful of how we treat others. The worst tragedies in history were usually the result of dehumanizing humans because of a stereotypical category in which they were placed, whether it be Jews in Nazi Germany or enslaved blacks in this country.

Now what about Islam? I agree with William Boykin, a Pentagon General who publicly said during the Iraq war that Muslims worship an idol, not a real God. Of course, I also believe that Boykin's Christian god is equally unreal. Gen. Boykin should not have given his personal opinion when acting as a representative of the United States. Much worse, however, was his referring to the United States as a Christian nation doing battle against Satan in Iraq. Not only was Boykin wrong about the U.S. being a Christian nation, but his views mirrored those of Osama bin Laden, who justified the 9/11





attack as an Islamic nation doing battle against Satan. Same imaginary Satan, different stereotype.

Because the Fort Hood shooter is Muslim, we must not go overboard in either perceiving all Muslims as evil, or in being tolerant to the extreme of praising the religion of Islam. We can criticize specific religious beliefs, especially those that inspire such tragedies, as the Fort Hood shootings may have been.

Not only must we be careful about stereotyping, we must also be careful about marginalizing or ignoring large segments of our population. Responding to this latest tragedy, leaders are calling for us to come together as a nation, which I support. But they need to be cautious when they claim to speak on behalf of Americans. I've already heard some say that the prayers of all Americans go out for the victims of this tragedy. But that excludes over 50 million Americans who don't pray.

To those politicians who feel the need to bring prayer into every important event, I wish they would at least include something about victims being in "our thoughts." If you'll pardon the stereotype, atheists don't pray, but we do think and feel. I, for one, sincerely regret the enormous pain the Fort Hood victims and their loved ones are going through.

By Herb Silverman | November 6, 2009; Silverman is Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston and Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America.



Should Prayer Treatments Be Covered?

Some powerful members of the Senate propose language in the healthcare bill that would prohibit discrimination against "religious and spiritual health care." The unstated purpose is to cover the cost of Christian Science prayer treatments in the healthcare bill.

This shouldn't be a problem. The church, says the treatments are effective; if so these people will not need real medical care. If, on the other hand, prayer treatments are not effective, they are a subsidy to the Church of Christ, Scientist and the program should be reimbursed by that amount. - *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 6 November 2009

Psychology Not Ready For A "Science" Label!

Progress in neural imaging, as well as molecular and behavioral genetics could have turned psychology into a robust science. But a recent study found that a high proportion of practitioners consider scientific evidence to be less important than their personal clinical experience. An editorial in yesterday's *Nature* found the field in danger of becoming as irrelevant as Freud

- *What's New* Robert L. Park, 15 October 2009



It's A Divining Bomb Detector!

There it was, on the front page of the *New York Times*; the Iraqi government has purchased more than 1500 devices known as the ADE 651 to use at checkpoints. That stands for Advanced Detection of Explosives. The 651 is the latest detection device marketed by

ATSC (UK) Ltd. It consists of a thin rod mounted on a swivel held by pistol grip, and is said to point to explosives. That's all it is, there are no sensors. According to Rod Nordland who wrote the article, a retired USAF officer said the device is nothing more than an explosives divining rod. The stupid Iraqis don't know this and paid \$16,500-\$60,000 each for them, even though American officers told them the devices are worthless. Boy, are they dumb! Wait, the *NYT* failed mention that the US Department of Defense was sold on these devices back in the 90s Although it was classified, they tipped off their favorite novelist, Tom Clancy, that the incredible device could detect people through thick walls by sensing their heartbeats. It was the basis of his novel, *Rainbow Six*, It was a scam. Thousands of similar devices are still in use by local police around the country to satisfy "probable cause" requirements for a property search. ATSC also sells a narcotic detector, but it's exactly the same device with a different number.

Why is it necessary to keep debunking this stuff?

Is there no memory? Where I grew up in Texas no one would think of digging a well until the local dowser using a willow fork approved the spot. Since then, dowsing for water has been debunked over and over, most thoroughly by James Randi. But dowsing is now used for everything. Last year, the power company needed to find a buried power cable on our road. I watched the lineman reach under the seat of his truck, pull out a stiff wire bent in the shape of a fork, and start dowsing for the cable. If it works for everything, there is no physical cause and it's not science.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 6 November 2009

Use Magnets And Never Pay Another Electric Bill.

The first time I heard that promise it was made by Joseph W. Newman on the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather in 1987. A Mississippi backwoods-mechanic with a grade-school education, Newman took a course in electricity. When he heard that doubling the number of turns in a coil would double the magnetic field, he left to wind a mighty coil that would generate more energy than it took. Newman never got to Lenz's law, and CBS did not bother to check with a scientist. About every five years since, that machine is reinvented. You can now build your own "energy machine" with a kit from Magnets4Energy, but it still won't work.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 6 November 2009



Godless Billboard Appears in Downtown Cincinnati

Cincinnati is the newest site to have a billboard raising awareness of non-theists in Cincinnati. Fred Edwards, formerly with the American Humanist Association and past FIG presenter, is heading up a new initiative, the United Coalition of Reason (United COR). United COR provides resources for local organizations to form a coalition and help local freethought communities organize and recruit new members. The Cincinnati Coalition of Reason (CinCoR) is comprised of FIG, Cincinnati Atheist Meetup and Camp Quest Ohio. Below is the press release that was sent out to Media Contacts in the region. (Cincinnati, November 10, 2009) **"Don't Believe In God? You are not alone."**



United CoR has launched ten campaigns previously this year. Each has involved a billboard or public transit ads. They have appeared in places as far flung as New York, Newark, New Jersey; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Charleston, South Carolina; Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas; Des Moines, Iowa; Morgantown, West Virginia; New Orleans, Louisiana, and Phoenix, Arizona.



The Cincinnati Coalition of Reason (www.CinCoR.org) is a group of like-minded member organizations from the greater Cincinnati area that advocate science and reason as more reliable sources of knowledge than dogma and faith. The United Coalition of Reason (www.unitedcor.org) exists to raise the visibility and sense of unity among local groups in the community of reason by providing funding and expertise to help them cooperate toward the goal of raising their public profiles.



These words are part of prominent billboard in downtown Cincinnati at the intersection of Reading Road and 12th Street, 1 block south of Liberty Street. Facing north, it can be seen

by traffic heading south. It was placed by CinCoR, the Cincinnati Coalition of Reason, with funding from United CoR, the United Coalition of Reason. The billboard's message is superimposed over an image of blue sky and fluffy white clouds.

The effort is part of a coordinated statewide campaign that includes similar billboards announced today in Columbus and Cleveland. Each billboard signifies the launch of a local, multi-organizational coalition of nontheistic groups. The stated aim of the coordinated campaign is to raise awareness about people who don't believe in a god.

"The point of our national billboard campaign is to reach out to the millions of humanists, atheists and agnostics living in the United States," explained Fred Edwards, national director of the United Coalition of Reason. "Nontheists sometimes don't realize there's a community out there for them because they're inundated with religious messages at every turn. So we hope this will serve as a beacon and let them know they aren't alone."

But reaching out to nontheists isn't the only goal of the campaign. "Our message is positive," added John Welte, coordinator of CinCoR. "There is a lot of misinformation out there about us. But we humanists, agnostics and atheists are essentially like anyone else. We're your friends, neighbors, coworkers and family members. All we seek is the opportunity to be as open about our values as others are."

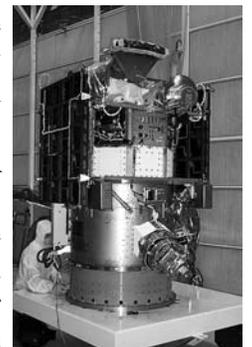
For more information contact:

Fred Edwards;	John Welte
National Director	Shawn Jeffers
United Coalition of Reason	Coordinators
202-550-9964	Cincinnati Coalition of Reason
fredwards@unitedcor.org	www.CinCoR.org
www.UnitedCoR.org	



Left For Dead By The Bushies, DSCOVER Twitches!

Congress appropriated \$9 million to refurbish the Deep Space Climate Observatory and its instruments. They have now been removed to the Goddard space flight Center for refurbishing. That's a good sign, but of course NASA says \$9 million is not enough. The observatory is meant to be located at the L1 point between the Earth and Sun from which it will determine whether climate change is due to variation in solar emission or human activity.



- *What's New* by Robert Park, 23 October 2009



Sometimes Less Is More:

When China introduced its One Child per Family policy 30 years ago there were gasps of horror from the religious right. Although there were many exceptions to the one child rule, the policy was indeed draconian. The utterly mad policies of Mao Zedong left few options if a humanitarian catastrophe on a scale not seen on Earth were to be avoided. The result was an economic miracle and perhaps a human rights miracle as well. According to a new study by the London School of Economics for the Optimum Population Trust of Great Britain, the policy resulted in the avoidance of something like 300 million births – the population of the United States. The Chinese argue that over the long run their avoided births will contribute more to reduction of carbon emissions than any amount of carbon sequestration. They're probably right. **Can the China experience be a lesson?** A paper in the *Journal of Environment and Urbanization* on Sep 28 points out that one sixth of the world's people are so poor that they produce no significant CO2 emissions. Is anyone surprised? The lesson many people have drawn from this is that because the poor are not contributing to global warming we don't need to trouble ourselves with their fecundity. Well, so much for trying to raise the wretched masses to a higher level. We must keep them poor lest they start polluting like the rest of us. What happened to raising them up?

– *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 30 October 2009

Still Looking For Rocket Fuel On The Moon?

We sat on the edges of our chairs to watch this once-in-a-lifetime spectacular. Over and over the TV audience was shown a simulation of a rocket plunging into a deep crater near the lunar South Pole and ejecting a mighty plume of rocket fuel. Uh, there was actually supposed to be water in the plume, along with stuff, but NASA sort of blurs the distinction: "If we have water it can be separated into hydrogen and oxygen." But doesn't that require a lot of energy? "Yes. But there's sunlight on the Moon, so we'll put solar power plants up there. That will give us the fuel to get to Mars, and when we find water on Mars we'll use that for the return flight." Back to the present, we began holding our breath as the final seconds counted down to impact. "Bull's-eye," NASA exulted! We looked at each other. Had I blinked at the wrong time? We are now told that, "The spectra is where the information is. Determining whether there was water in the invisible plume will take weeks or months." I hardly can wait.

– *What's New* Robert L. Park, 15 October 2009

A California Court Vindicates Thales Of Miletus (~ 600 Bce) On Causality.

For eight years *WN* has tracked the case of the infamous Columbia Prayer Study in which it was claimed that intercessory prayer doubled the pregnancy rate of women undergoing in vitro fertilization. It was, of course, a scam. A California physician, Bruce Flamm, thought Columbia should disavow the work, and the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* should delete the clearly fraudulent paper; neither happened. The response of one of the authors, the wealthy owner of several fertility clinics in the US and Korea, was to sue Flamm for everything he had. Flamm never blinked. This week the Court of Appeals affirmed a lower-court decision tossing out the lawsuit. In doing so, the Court also vindicated Thales of Miletus, who in the course of explaining a total eclipse of the sun in 585 B.C. concluded that every observable effect has a physical cause.

– *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 30 October 2009

There Are More Than One Billion Hungry People!

Scientific experts from around the world met in Rome last week to discuss the problem of feeding a rapidly growing human population in a world facing a severe shortage of water for irrigation and the diversion of crops to biofuel. In his 1970 Nobel acceptance speech, Norman Borlaug, who led the green revolution, knew that hunger had not been abolished: "For we are dealing with two opposing forces, the scientific power of food production and the biologic power of human reproduction... There can be no permanent progress in the battle against hunger until the agencies that fight for increased food production and those that fight for population control unite in a common effort." A fertility rate less than two would ameliorate most problems humanity faces. What will it take for the world to learn?

– *What's New* by Robert Park, 23 October 2009

Panel Finds Little For Astronauts To Do.

As described by Joel Achenbach in this morning's *Washington Post*, "Seeking a Human Spaceflight Program Worthy of a Great Nation," the final report of the ten person committee led by former aerospace executive Norman Augustine, came up empty. The 154 page report is unenthusiastic about the Ares I rocket under development to replace the space shuttle, and suggested a heavy lift rocket to take astronauts beyond low-Earth orbit. Augustine said NASA should be building spaceships that can travel to distant destinations "rather than running a trucking service to low-Earth orbit." Yes, of course, but what distant destination? The panel proposes a flyby of Mars. A flyby? We conduct a huge and costly mission just to look out the window? Perhaps they could point their cell phone out the window.

– *What's New* by Robert Park, 23 October 2009





The Center for Inquiry is launching a Secular Celebrant Program!

CFI Secular Celebrant Training December 5, 2009

Center for Inquiry Indiana
350 Canal Walk, Suite A, Indianapolis, IN

Why a CFI Secular Celebrant Program?

As we move through life, we celebrate many occasions filled with joy and love, accomplishment and striving, loss and grief. Unfortunately, the choice of persons to conduct ceremonies for these occasions is usually between religious clergy and impersonal civil officials.

For the 16% of the U.S. population not affiliated with any religion, this can be a traumatic experience.

They may be required to go through religious counseling and/or have religious references in their ceremony. They may be prevented from having their choice of music or readings as part of the ceremony. The local minister called on to conduct a funeral/memorial may preach a “come to Jesus” sermon or otherwise use religious references that are not in keeping with the worldview of the person being memorialized. Many of us have seen this done.

Wedding ceremonies, memorials, and other life passages are extremely important events—they are life's milestones—and people should be able to have these ceremonies conducted in a manner and by a person of their choosing.

While some people of the secular worldview do not see a need for rituals and ceremonies of any kind, many feel that having a way of marking life passages is important. CFI feels that this is a personal choice and that secular ceremonies—and persons to conduct these ceremonies—should be available to those who want them.

Who can become a Secular Celebrant?

CFI Secular Celebrant Training is open to all, but additional steps are required of those wishing to receive CFI Secular Celebrant Certification and listing in the CFI Celebrant Directory. Cost for all-day training workshop: \$75.00

Instructors:

CFI Secular Celebrant Training in Indianapolis will be led by **Reba Boyd Wooden**, Executive Director of CFI Indiana, and **Jim Underdown**, Executive Director of CFI Los Angeles. Both have performed many dozens of ceremonies and have taught the art of secular celebrations to many others. They will be joined by **John Shook**, CFI Vice President and Senior Research Fellow, and **D.J. Grothe**, CFI Vice President and Director of Outreach Programs.

We are excited about this new CFI program and look forward to meeting you in Indianapolis!

Reba Boyd Wooden, Executive Director, CFI Indiana; Jim Underdown, Executive Director, CFI Los Angeles, Co-directors CFI Secular Celebrant Program.

Questions? Call 317-423-0710 or email: rwooden@centerforinquiry.net



Cancer Is The Only Thing Cell Phones Don't Cause.

A call to 911 on a cell phone saved my life when a tree fell on me, but I still refuse to carry one of the damned things. They are rude and obtrusive and they go off in my class when I'm lecturing - but they don't cause cancer. Yes, I know, there's another study that says they do.

Cancer can result from mutant strands of DNA caused by radiation, but not by radiation in the microwave spectrum. It's not nearly energetic enough, and that's that. These are not studies done in a laboratory; they are statistical studies cooked from phone-company records and seasoned with a handful of celebrity anecdotes. Almost everybody uses a cell phone today. Is brain cancer a new problem?

— *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 30 October 2009



Conrad sat at the bar staring at his glass of beer, but before he could drink it, a big truck driver took it from his hand and drank it down. Suddenly, Conrad burst into tears. The truck driver laughed, “Can't you take a joke, mister?” Conrad sighed, “Well, it's been such a dreadful day that it's hard for me to laugh! First of all, I overslept and got to work late so my boss fired me. When I left the building, I discovered my car had been stolen. So I grabbed a cab to take me home, and left my wallet on the back seat. Then I walked inside and discovered my wife smooching with my best friend. And you know the worst thing?” “What's that?” laughed the truck driver. “Just when I was thinking about ending my life,” moaned Conrad, “you showed up and drank my poison.”





BOOK REVIEWS

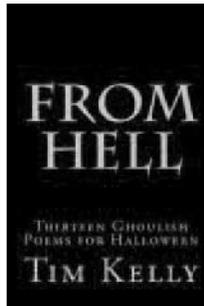
From Hell: Thirteen Goulish Poems for Halloween

by Tim Kelly

(CreateSpace/Amazon, October 2009)

For those of you who are not familiar with the Nightmare on Garrard Street in Covington and Tim's Facebook page "Pastor Vlad,"* the "Master" has asked me to pass along the following info:

As most of you know, although the Master spoke and preached publicly for centuries, he now no longer speaks outside the Castle, the Council Chambers, and the Inner Circle. He now communicates to the outside world only in poetry. And to this end he has now formally published a collection of some of his poems. He hopes it to be the first of many. The book also contains two poems detailing some of the Master's personal history.



The Master has chosen to publish under the pseudonym "Tim Kelly" for reasons of propriety as well as security since there are still many in the world hostile to his kind, particularly those associated with the Van Helsing Institute**. You may find the book on Amazon.

It is Halloween poetry, so there are /religious theistic references, but they are on the spooky/Hellish side. Wonderfully scary poems for reading by candlelight on a long, dark night. Tim also has a Facebook page that serves as the "front" for his darker writing under the name Pastor Vlad. It is a lot of fun for any who are on Facebook.

* a.k.a. the Impaler, Count Dracula, vampire, and worse.

** You could google it, or look it up on Wikipedia, or better not.

One Reviewer On Amazon Had This To Say:

Loved it, loved it, loved it. These skillfully written poems need not be confined to Halloween. I will re-read them many times. They lend themselves beautifully to being read aloud. A wonderful fresh perspective. I couldn't pick one favorite if I had to. Keep an eye on this author. I hope there will be a lot more to follow.

Various characters have commented: (on the back cover): Merlin: "Spellbinding." Charon: "Makes the ferry ride seem shorter." G. Reaper: "These poems are absolutely to die for." Mummy: "I became completely wrapped up in them." Count Dracula: "You can really sink your teeth into these."



From The Conclusion Of The *Good Book*

by David Plotz (pp. 302-303)

You surely notice that I'm not saying anything about belief. I began the Bible as a hopeful, but indifferent, agnostic. I wished for a God, but I didn't really care. I leave the Bible as a hopeless and angry agnostic. I'm brokenhearted about God.

After reading about the genocides, the plagues, the murders, the mass enslavements, the ruthless vengeance for minor sins (or no sin at all), and all that smiting—every bit of it directly performed, authorized, or approved by God—I can only conclude that the God of the Hebrew Bible, if He existed, was awful, cruel, and capricious. He gives us moments of beauty—sublime beauty and grace!—but taken as a whole, He is no God I want to obey, and no God I can love.

When I complain to religious friends about how much He dismays me, I usually get one of two responses. Christians say, "Well, yes, but this is all setup for the New Testament." To them, reading only the Old Testament is like leaving halfway through a movie. I'm missing all the redemption. If I want to find grace, forgiveness, and wonder, I have to read and believe the story of Jesus Christ, which explains and redeems all. But that doesn't work for me. I'm a Jew. I don't, and can't, believe that Christ died for my sins. And even if I did, I still don't think that would wash away God's epic crimes in the Old Testament.

The second response tends to come from Jews, who razz me for missing the chief lesson of the Hebrew Bible: that we can't hope to understand the ways of God. If He seems cruel or petty, that's because we can't fathom His plan for us. But I'm not buying that, either. If God made me, He made me rational and quizzical. He has given me the tools to think about Him. So I must submit Him to rational and moral inquiry. And He fails that examination. Why would anyone want to be ruled by a God who's so unmerciful, unjust, unforgiving, and unloving?

Unfortunately, this line of reasoning seems to leave me with several unappealing options: (1) believing in no god; (2) believing in the awful, vindictive god of the Bible; or (3) believing in a vague "creator" who is not remotely attached to the events of the Bible, who didn't really do any of the deeds ascribed to him in the Bible, and who thus can't be held responsible for them. ☘



BOOK REVIEW

Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know About Them)
by Bart D. Ehrman
(New York: HarperCollins, 2009)

The author of this book is at pains to emphasize repeatedly he is recounting historical insights in the New Testament which have long been known to serious scholars and are widely and generally accepted in the academy. Thus, most of us could be expected to be familiar with the multiplicity of contradictions and disagreements among the books of the NT, and indeed with the contradictions appearing within books. Only two books tell the birth story. Matthew has the family living in Bethlehem, and only later, after fleeing to Egypt, moving to Nazareth; the other book which carries the birth story, Luke, has the fully pregnant mother traveling to Bethlehem just before the birth because the Messiah must be born there. Only Matthew has the slaughter of the innocents, the wise men, and the flight to Egypt. Only Luke recounts the stable and the shepherds. The Christmas story we get at home and in church combobulates the two gospels creating yet a different third story.

Each gospel tells of the resurrection and what happened afterwards, but each one tells it differently. These differences are not trivial, but have a bearing on the gospel author's thought and what he considered was the meaning and intent of Jesus. Most of us are probably aware the gospels were not written by the apostles, or companions of apostles to whom they are ascribed. These books were composed long after the historical events, and the names Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were attached to them only later. Only seven of the letters ascribed to Paul are thought to have been actually written by him, the others were forged in his name, and generally contradict Paul's theology.

Ehrman insists that to understand the historical truth we need to listen to what each gospel has to say, not try to combine them. Mark emphasizes the persecution and suffering of Jesus, who dies in despair. Immediately

on his death the curtain of the Temple holy of holies rips, signifying that the Jewish people no longer need the priests to act as intermediaries. Jesus suffering in Luke is quite unlike that in Mark; throughout Jesus is in control and continues preaching to the bystanders and promise salvation to the thief crucified with him. Matthew, unlike Luke, emphasizes the continuity from the Hebrew Scripture showing (mistakenly) how all the Jesus events were predicted there.

That Jesus was born of a virgin appears only in Matthew and Luke, which may be considered a miracle, but he remains a human being. Only the gospel of John, without the virgin birth, insists Jesus existed with god from eternity and is (part of) god. But, the Trinity is attested noplacement in the gospels and appears in fact a later invention of the orthodox church.

Reading the gospels one by one, from the oldest, Mark, through John, the authentic Pauline letters, and the later writing provides a fair view of the development of Christianity. Paul and the three early gospels very much expected Jesus to return in the writers' life times to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Only as time passed and the early witnesses died did interpretations change. From an expectation of the Kingdom on Earth and the resurrection of the dead, we get the invention of Heaven and Hell and judgement immediately following death.

Ehrman has written a fascinating story about what serious historical study of the books of the New Testament can teach us. The Bible itself quite clearly is not a coherent book telling a consistent story, but a series of independent writings which tell of change and development of the religion of Christianity. The Jesus of history, if he existed as told in the first three gospels was a Jewish rabbi who expected the end of the present world to come soon. Some Christians are still expecting it. Jesus did not speak to the gentiles and had not intention of doing so. The gentile religion was invented by Paul, and that Christianity has nothing to do with Jesus.

Ehrman's last chapter explicitly defends the Christian faith as "possible" despite what he has just written about it's history as recounted in the only sources extant. I really find that belief utterly unconvincing. ☚

- Wolf Roder





No Dec. Potuck is scheduled
December Meeting
 Tuesday Dec. 15 at 7:00 PM



November Meeting
 Thursday Nov 19 at 6:30 PM



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

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail - figmessage at gofigger dot org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.