

FIG LEAVES

Volume 16 Issue 10

October 2007

October FIG Meeting:

Sunday, 28 October 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor

Jack London: Author And Heretic

Speaker: Timothy J. Madigan, Ph.D.

Jack London (1876-1916) remains one of the most-read of all American novelists. In his short life he managed to write such classic novels as *The Call of the Wild*, *John Barleycorn*, *Martin Eden*, *The Sea Wolf* and *The Iron Heel* (a dystopian work that influenced George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*), as well as countless short stories, newspaper articles and plays.

Raised by a spiritualist mother, from whom he later became estranged, London was always an unconventional thinker. An avowed socialist until shortly before his death, he considered himself to be an atheist, and he was always critical of organized religion. His views on women, racial matters, and politics remain controversial. Tim Madigan will discuss the continuing relevance of London's life and work, especially his uneasy mixture of rugged individualism and concern for the downtrodden, exemplified in his book *The People of the Abyss* and his essay "How I Became a Socialist."

Tim Madigan teaches philosophy at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York and was formerly the editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is one of our favorite speakers, having spoken to FIG at our initial meeting in 1991 and almost every year since.

November Meeting

There will be no Fig Meeting in November so as not to interfere with the harvest festival celebrations late in the month, i.e. 22 November.

December Meeting Tues. 11 Dec. 2007 at 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
-Note Early Date

Christmas in America

Speaker: Conrad Goeringer

Conrad has been researching the rise of Christmas. In the early years of the colony and the Founding Fathers, Christmas was generally ignored and not celebrated. Conrad is going to talk about its growing prominence as a religious, civic, and commercial holiday

January Meeting: Tues. 22 Jan. 2008 at 7:00PM at the Vernon Manor

The Lion's Way

Speaker: Peter Lloyd

Our fellow Fig member has written a new book he will tell us about. The Roman Empire has not fallen. It thrives, having conquered the world under an enlightened political policy called *Empathia*, inspired by an all-but-forgotten Jesus. Never crucified, Jesus was kidnapped at the peak of his popularity by the emperor Tiberius, who used his revolutionary and empathetic ideas to rehabilitate the Roman Empire.

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Events

October Meeting

Sunday, October 28, 2007, 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

November Potluck

Tuesday, November 13, 2007, 6:30 PM at the home of

November Meeting

No Meeting
Enjoy your Harvest Festivities

December Potluck

No Potluck -
See you at the meeting!!

December Meeting

Tuesday, December 11, 2007, 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH



September Meeting

Making Sense of Global Warming

Wolf Roder, Retired Professor of Geography, University of Cincinnati

Let it be noted, Wolf volunteered to speak on issues of global warming in place of the announced speaker who was unable to be present.

Wolf started by defining climate, what we mean by it, and how we measure it. And that "green house effect" is a misnomer, as the atmosphere does not function like the glass of a green house. We tell students climate is the 'average' weather, the weather that you expect. That sounds like something artificial, a made up variable. Yet it is something real; your house is built to withstand the climate, that is the year round expected weather. If you lived in southern Florida your house wouldn't need a furnace, and if you lived Alaska your house would need much more insulation. If you consider your closet, your clothes are adjusted to the climate. We need summer and winter clothes, in the tropics we could dispense with winter wardrobe. So the climate is a real thing. Animals know what the climate is; trees know the climate, know when to drop their leaves and when to grow them back

If we want to measure the climate, we have to do something arithmetical; that is we take an average. Wolf then displayed various standard climographs which display a curve of monthly mean temperature and precipitation at a place. No two places have exactly the same climate. Wolf also showed the climograph for Cincinnati.

This is not the only way to summarize climate. Wolf showed a graph of daily average high and low temperatures with record highs and lows for the course of the year. The television weather announcer compares the weather today with these climatic data. It is the only way you know how warm or cold it is. Averages are usually taken over at least a fifty year period, extremes over the whole period of record. Highest temperature in Cincinnati ever is 109°F, lowest -25°F.

What is happening in the atmosphere that allows us to talk about global warming? We average together weather stations well distributed over the earth, both northern and southern hemispheres. We do this for the whole year. Tracking this number,

about 15°C (or 59°F), we find that the mean temperature of the earth has been slowly increasing for the globe as a whole over the past 120 years, which is about as long as we have had weather stations.

First of all, the atmosphere is a gas, actually a mixture of gases, 1/5th of which is oxygen and 4/5ths is nitrogen. This leaves 1% which is mostly argon. Argon is a noble gas, so called because it won't combine with any other element. Then there is a very small amount of carbon dioxide, 0.033% or 330 ppm, (parts per million); this is a powerful "green house gas." There are other gases that play a part in global warming, particularly methane and ozone and various nitrogen oxides, but those occur in very



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

figinfo@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.

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Climograph
Mean Monthly Temp. and Precipitation
Cincinnati, Ohio

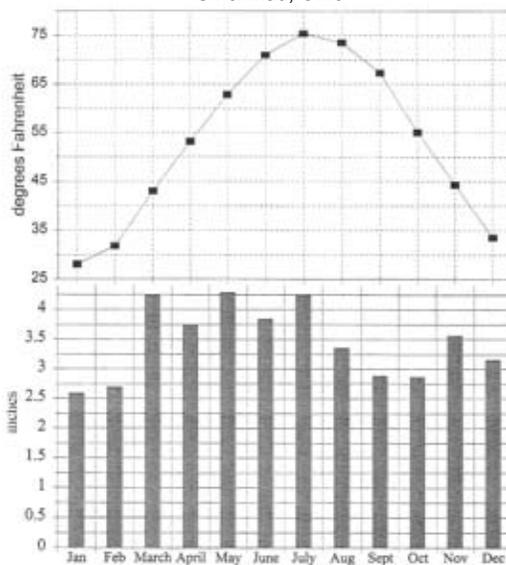




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small quantities.

What happens with this atmosphere and what warms it? We have all experienced, when one goes higher up in the atmosphere it gets colder. On a mountain in New England or the Rockies you may encounter snow at higher elevations. As a matter of fact, in certain places in the Rockies, you may encounter permanent snow that has turned to ice, meaning it is a glacier.

Temperature declines fairly regularly with altitude in the lower atmosphere, which is called the troposphere. This is the layer which concerns us, this is where weather takes place. If you are at 70 degrees at sea level and climb to the top of Pike's Peak at 14,000



Mt. Kilimanjaro; Kibo Peak

feet the temperature is likely to be below freezing. The reason for this regular decline in temperature is that the atmosphere is warmed from below. That is because the solar energy that comes from the sun goes right through the atmosphere as through a window. That is why it is called the "green house effect." The solar energy is not all light but is electromagnetic radiation. About 40% of what we get from the sun is visible light, about 50% is infrared which we experience as radiant heat and about 10% is ultraviolet. This energy is very penetrating and much goes right through the atmosphere and hits the earth.

Wolf then projected a slide that shows what happens to the incoming energy. It may be absorbed, and heat what absorbs it, or it can be reflected. Reflection allows us to see things. About a third of the energy that comes from the sun is reflected back into space and is lost to us. The atmosphere itself, mostly in the layers higher than the troposphere, absorbs some of the solar energy. Only about half of the incoming energy is absorbed by and warms the earth's surface.

The ground radiates energy which is absorbed by and warms the atmosphere because the atmosphere intercepts the longer wave radiation from the ground. The intercepting gases we call "greenhouse gases." The most important

are water vapor and carbon dioxide and to a lesser extent methane and others. So what is the greenhouse effect? Wolf likes to compare it to a blanket. Camping on a cold night you climb into your sleeping bag and it is ice cold. What warms up your sleeping bag is the outgoing energy that your body throws off. We are radiating heat because we are warm blooded animals, warmer than

the environment. The sleeping bag keeps the heat in for a time, it slows heat dispersion. In the green house effect the atmosphere acts like a blanket, keeping the heat in, slowing its dispersion to space. Global warming is a thickening of that atmospheric blanket.

Wolf displayed a modern computer projection of what will happen after 2000. If we are very careful and do everything we can to reduce carbon dioxide levels, we may keep global warming to 2 F degrees; if we don't do anything to curb burning fossil fuels, the temperature will rise 8 - 9 F degrees. The computer model projections have not changed very much in the last eight years.

Wolf sees two major problems. When people make small life style changes, more efficient light bulbs, hybrid cars, installing solar panels, and such, they are just playing games. Real change means shutting down many power stations and using fewer cars and trucks.

Wolf talked a bit about the problems of global measurement. He displayed two diagrams of the global carbon cycle. We have a pretty good idea of how much fossil fuel is burned on earth and how much carbon is going into the atmosphere, about 5 gigatons (billions of tons). A very uncertain quantity is the destruction of forests and soils, some 1 to 4 gt. We would like to know where the carbon goes, besides the air. One thing Wolf tried to impress on us: compared to the regular exchange of carbon dioxide with the ocean, with animals and plants, each on the order of 70-100 gt we are looking for a needle in a haystack.

Another measurement uncertainty are weather ⇨



stations in and near cities. The city may be ten degrees warmer than nearby country areas. It's in the nature of human activities that we put weather stations into major population centers. In Cincinnati for a long time the weather station was at Lunken Airport and is now at the airport in Kentucky. The city grows around the airport and increasingly reflects the urban heat island. If each urban weather station gets a little bit warmer than it should be and so we get this rise in global temperature, but what we really measure is the expansion of cities. This is an argument that was made at least thirty years ago when scientists first tried to calculate global temperature. Since, problems of individual weather stations have been allowed for, but some experts still wonder if we actually measure the global average and is it really going up or are we seeing some artificial number?

Briefly looking at a slightly different topic, measurement of sea level change. The sea level for the last century from 1880 to about 1985 rose by 12 centimeters (about 5 inches). At the end of this century it may go up by 110 centimeters. These are computer estimates, and do not take the Greenland melting into account. People ask what will happen to the rainfall? There will be more evaporation and more water vapor in the air and that thickens the atmospheric blanket more since water vapor is a major cause of the greenhouse effect. So expect to get more rainfall somewhere in the world, but calculations are difficult.

Wolf showed a number of pictures of glaciers before and after, then and now over the years. Glaciers have been melting, – disappearing, -- all over the world. Glaciers are excellent integrators of climate and the best evidence that global warming is indeed happening, now! Wolf finally projected some slides showing the Arctic with summer ice melting to the tune of one million square miles, one third the area of the United States. On that disturbing note we will close this report.

– Reported by George Maurer ☘



High Court Says No to New Rights for Church Groups

By David G. Savage,

The Los Angeles Times, 2 October 2007

Washington - The Supreme Court on Monday refused to expand the rights of church groups, turning down appeals in a pair of cases.

Justices rebuff a quest for religious services in a library, along with a Catholic group's effort to avoid paying for employees' birth control. In the first case, the justices declined to hear a free-speech claim from an evangelical minister in Northern California who wanted to hold worship services in a public library meeting room. In the second, they refused to hear a freedom-of-religion claim from Catholic Charities in New York, which objected to a state law requiring that employees' prescription drug coverage include contraceptives. The cases were on a long list dismissed on opening day of the court's term.

In the past, the high court has said public officials may not discriminate against "religious speech" by, for example, excluding a church group from meeting in the evening at a high school auditorium that is open to other community organizations. Lawyers for the Alliance Defense Fund, the Christian Legal Society and the National Assn. of Evangelicals had urged the court to go a step further and rule that officials may not exclude "religious services" from public buildings. They called it unconstitutional to distinguish between "speech" and "services."

They backed an appeal filed by Pastor Hattie Hopkins, who wanted to hold prayer and worship services in a meeting room in a public library in Antioch, northeast of Oakland.

"Religious worship is not a second-class form of expression that the government may ban from a forum generally open for indistinguishable 'secular' expression," said lawyers for Hopkins and the Faith Center Church Evangelistic Ministries.

The issue split the federal courts in California. A judge ruled the library must open its meeting room to Hopkins, but a panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed, 2-1. The 1st Amendment does not require that the library be "transformed into an occasional house of worship," said Judge Richard A. Paez of Los Angeles, a Clinton appointee. There is a difference between "religious



The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup
When: Tuesday, 16 October at 8:00PM
Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers
 2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
 Cincinnati OH 45207; 513-396-8966
 To see who's coming and to see more event details:
http://atheists.meetup.com/90/calendar/5140742/t/cv1_ve



speech” and a “sermon,” another judge said. The full 9th Circuit refused to rehear the case, but seven of its judges filed a dissent. The ruling against Hopkins “turned a blind eye to blatant viewpoint discrimination” by singling out “what it calls ‘mere religious worship’ for exclusion,” wrote Judge Jay S. Bybee, a Bush appointee. By turning down the appeal, the Supreme Court let stand the 9th Circuit panel’s decision.

In the New York case, lawyers for the plaintiff said Catholic Charities should not be forced “to finance conduct that the church teaches is sinful.” Besides New York, more than 20 states (including California) have laws that require employers to include contraceptives in drug coverage. Though churches themselves are exempt from the laws, the exemption does not extend to church-related groups. “If the state can compel church entities to subsidize contraceptives in violation of their religious beliefs, it can compel them to subsidize abortions as well,” the lawyers argued. The justices turned down a similar challenge to California’s prescription-drug law in 2004.

God Sued

Nebraska State Senator Ernie Chambers, 70, a civil rights leader in Omaha’s black community, is described as Nebraska’s most prominent and outspoken black leader. Now he’s suing God – presumably the Jehovah/Moses/Abraham version we know to be insecure, petulant, vindictive, vengeful, and so very full of Himself – to prove a point about frivolous lawsuits. Ernie says that senators have periodically offered bills prohibiting the filing of certain types of suits. “Thus, anybody can file a lawsuit against anybody – even God,” he said. His lawsuit seeks a permanent injunction ordering God to cease certain harmful activities and the making of terroristic threats.

The lawsuit admits that the God against whom the senator brings the action, goes by all sorts of alternate names, titles and designations, and it also recognizes the fact that the defendant – by accepted definition – is omnipresent, though in the lawsuit, Chambers said he’s tried – unsuccessfully – to contact God on numerous occasions. That “omnipresent” attribute suggested to the senator that God will thereby automatically have knowledge of



the action, and has therefore requested that the court waive the “personal service” requirement. The lawsuit says that God has caused

...fearsome floods, egregious earthquakes, horrendous hurricanes, terrifying tornadoes, pestilential plagues, ferocious famines, devastating droughts, genocidal wars, birth defects and the like along with ...calamitous catastrophes resulting in the wide-spread death, destruction and terrorization of millions upon millions of the Earth’s inhabitants including innocent babes, infants, children, the aged and infirm without mercy or distinction.

Chambers asks for the court to grant him a summary judgment. He said that as an alternative, he wants the judge to set a date for a hearing as expeditiously as possible and enter a permanent injunction enjoining God from engaging in the types of deleterious actions and the making of terroristic threats he has described in the lawsuit.

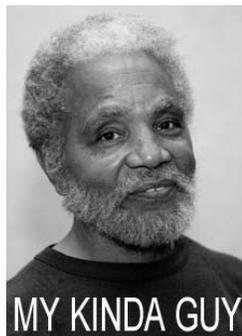
The Omaha senator, who skips morning prayers during the legislative session and often criticizes Christians, said that his lawsuit was brought about by a federal suit filed against a judge who recently barred words such as “rape” and “victim” from a sexual assault trial. That’s perfectly understandable, since we wouldn’t want the facts to be revealed to the jury...

Colorado Students Walk Out During Pledge, Recite Own Version

(27 September 2007)

About fifty Boulder, Colorado, High School students walked out of class Thursday to protest the daily reading of the Pledge of Allegiance and recited their own version, omitting “one nation, under God.” The students say the phrase violates the constitutional separation of church and state. They also say the daily reading of the pledge over the school public address system at the start of the second class takes away from education time and is ignored or mocked by some students.

A state law passed in 2004 requires schools to offer the opportunity to recite the pledge each day but does not require students to participate. The protesting students, members of the Student Worker Club, want administrators to hold the pledge reading in the auditorium during each of the school’s two lunch periods for any students who want to participate. Otherwise, they said, they plan to walk out each Thursday when the pledge is ➡





read and recite their version, which omits the reference to God and adds allegiance to constitutional rights, diversity and freedom, among other things.

“Boulder High has a highly diverse population, not all of whom believe in God, or one God,” said Emma Martens, a senior and president of the club, which has about a dozen members. “We didn’t think it was fair for the whole school to have to listen to it. It’s almost religious oppression,” she said.



Principal Bud Jenkins told the *Camera* newspaper on its Web site Thursday the pledge will not be moved, but added he was proud of the students for standing up for their beliefs. It was not immediately clear what discipline, if any, the protesting students would face.

A Demonstration of Christian Love.

A teen girl at a Christian “boot camp” in Banquete, Texas, was ordered to jog. When Siobahn McClintock, 15, ran out of steam, she says, camp director Charles Eugene Flowers, 46, who holds the title of “Commandant”, told training assistant Stephanie Bassitt, 20, to hold her down while he tied her up. He then tied the rope to the camp’s van and dragged the girl behind it.

McClintock was treated in a hospital, but camp officials wouldn’t let her call her mother, who had signed the required consent form. The form states: “I realize that Christian Boot Camp is a strenuous [sic] and highly intense program. I further realize that the possibility of accident, injury or even fatality to my child does exist.”

That doesn’t exonerate Bassitt or Flowers, the pastor of a San Antonio church: they were charged with aggravated assault and face up to twenty years in prison. The camp is run by Love Demonstrated Ministries to “reinstall the values that have been lost in our society.”

(San Antonio News-Express)

Quote

Politics and governing demand compromise. But these Christians believe they are acting in the name of God, so they can’t and won’t compromise. I know, I’ve tried to deal with them.

– Barry Goldwater

Unquote

Senator Vitter battles Darwinism

Poor Senator Larry Craig (R-Id) fumbled. Busted for foot tapping in the men’s room, he first pled guilty and then denied it. But when the phone number of “moral-values” Senator David Vitter (R-La) showed up in the “client” book of a DC Madam, he knew just what to do: he immediately repented. He understood, as Craig did not, that fundamentalist Christians love a sinner who repents; the more times they sin and repent the better. As a token of repentance, Vitter earmarked \$100,000 of taxpayer’s money for the Louisiana Family Forum “to develop a plan to promote science education.” That’s Family-Forum talk for “get Darwin out of the schools.” Ironically, Darwin’s theory explains why Vitter sinned.

Scientists are victims of Bait and Switch. A story by Cornelia Dean in yesterday’s NY Times described the production of a documentary titled *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*. Leading Darwinists were interviewed, but they had been misled about the name and purpose of the film and they’re pissed. The film, set to open in February, is described as “a startling revelation that freedom of thought and inquiry have been expelled” from public educational institutions. It cites the case of Guillermo Gonzalez, author of *The Privileged Planet*. The book is a daffy twist on the already daffy anthropic principle. To paraphrase: “If things were different than the way things are, things would not be the same.” Gonzalez was denied tenure at Iowa State for the reason anyone is denied tenure: department members didn’t want him as a colleague. They made a good decision.

– *What’s New* Robert Park, 28 September 2007 ☘

Dawkins rails at ‘creationist front’ for duping him into film role

Ewen MacAskill, *The Guardian* (28 September 2007)

Among the films being shown tonight at the Atheist Alliance convention taking place near Washington is, unsurprisingly, Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*. What will not be showing are trailers for a new movie, *Expelled*.

Some of the world’s best-known atheists, including British scientist Richard Dawkins, appear in the documentary, but they are unhappy with it. They say they agreed to appear in a documentary called *Crossroads*, but have ended up instead in *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*. They had expected *Crossroads* to be a debate about creationism versus Darwinism, but *Expelled* supports intelligent design (ID), a variation on creationism. ➡



The premise of *Expelled* is that scientists sympathetic to intelligent design are penalised by being denied academic posts.

The film, to have its premiere on February 12 in cinemas across the US, is fronted by Ben Stein, an actor and New York Times columnist. The timing may be linked to the 2008 presidential election, where creationism versus Darwinism often features in candidates' debates.

Professor Dawkins, who is speaking at the Atheist Alliance convention in Crystal City, Virginia, said in an email that had he known the film's premise he would not have agreed to take part. "At no time was I given the slightest clue that these people were a creationist front," he said. Other atheists said they were uneasy about the way they felt they had been duped.

Paul Zachary "PZ" Myers, a biology professor at the University of Minnesota and a leading critic of creationism, reproduced on Prof Dawkins' website a letter from Mark Mathis, a producer for Rampant Films. It says: "We are in production of the documentary film *Crossroads: The Intersection of Science and Religion* ... we are interested in asking you questions about the disconnect/controversy that exists in America between evolution, creationism and the

intelligent design movement." Professor Myers agreed to do the interview, but was surprised to see his name appear instead in what he described as "this new ID creationist movie" - *Expelled*.

Stein denied in the New York Times that he had misled anyone. "I don't remember a single person asking me what the movie was about," he said. The film company said the movie's title was changed on the advice of marketing experts. ☩

Koran: 'Whoever changes religion - kill him'

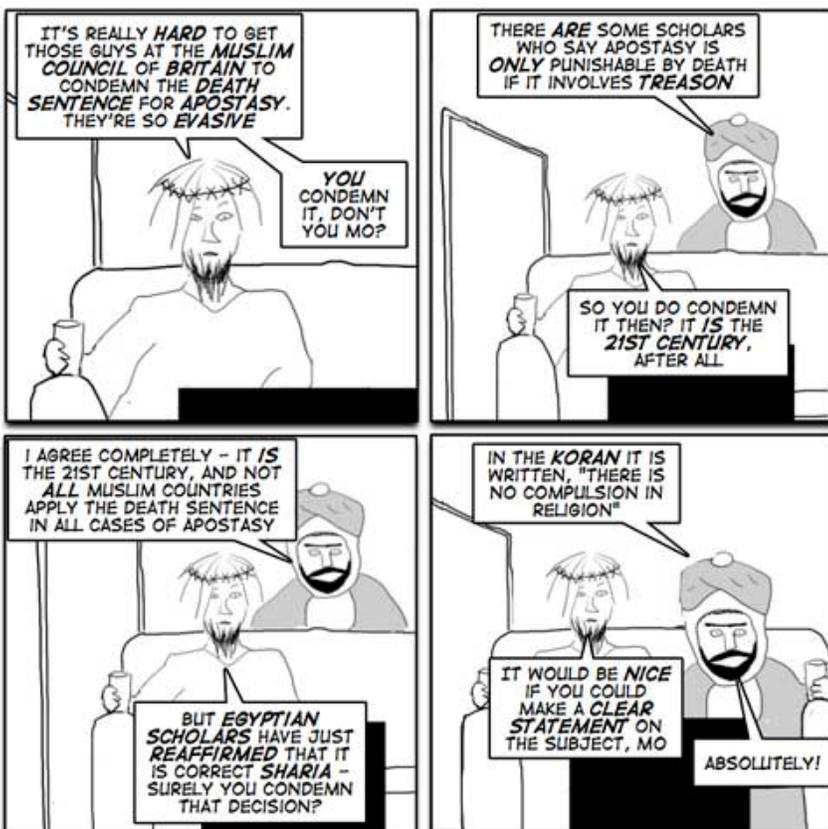
Ruth Gledhill *The London Times*; 21 March 2006

THE Koran is contradictory on the fate of those who deny the truth of Islam. Fourteen passages refer to apostasy and, of these, seven refer to punishment, generally to be given in the next life. Sura 40 says that those who reject the scriptures will have iron collars and chains placed around their necks, be dragged into scalding water and burnt in the fire. Elsewhere the Koran seems to indicate a degree of tolerance. Verse 2.256 states: "There is no compulsion in religion." Two further suras, 10 and 18, include passages indicating that people who do not wish to believe should not be forced to.

But the Hadith, or sayings of the Prophet, condemns unequivocally those who renounce their religion. One passage advises the death penalty for murder, adultery and apostasy. Another cites Muhammad as saying: "Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him."

According to Mufti Abdul Barkatullah, senior imam at North Finchley Mosque, North London, Islam simply took over biblical tradition and practice in this regard. Jesus promised in John xiv,6: "No one comes to the Father except by me." Several other passages in the New Testament condemn non-Christians to eternal punishment. Mufti Barkatullah cited the Inquisition as an example of Christian intolerance.

Muslim scholars are divided over how the texts on apostasy should be interpreted. Mufti Barkatullah said that some countries would follow the Shafi-i school of thought and eschew the death penalty for apostasy. But many, such as Afghanistan, adhere to the Hanafi tradition, and take a strict line on apostasy. ☩



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Un petit scoop sur Bush, Chirac, Dieu, Gog et Magog

by Jacques Sterchi (*La Liberté* of Fribourg)

17 September 2007; Translation: Leslie Thatcher

In 2003, University of Lausanne theology professor Thomas Römer received a telephone call from the Elysée. Jacques Chirac's advisers wanted to know more about Gog and Magog ... two mysterious names pronounced by George W. Bush while he was attempting to convince France to enter the war in Iraq at his side. In its September edition, the University of Lausanne's review, *Allez savoir*, reveals this story that could seem fantastic did it not, as *Allez savoir's* Editor-in-Chief Jocelyn Rochat emphasizes, reveal the religious underpinnings of Bush's policy.

Apocalyptic prophecy: Bush would have declared to Chirac that Gog and Magog were at work in the Middle East and that the Biblical prophecies were in the process of being fulfilled. That was several weeks before the intervention in Iraq. The French president, to whom the names of Gog and Magog meant nothing, was stupefied.

In *Allez savoir*, Thomas Römer details: Gog and Magog are two creatures who appear in Genesis, and especially in the most arcane chapters of the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel. An apocalyptic prophecy of a global army giving final battle in Israel. "This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase his people's enemies before a New Age begins," continues Thomas Römer. According to him, George W. Bush is not the first to look for an incarnation of Gog and Magog on earth. Ronald Reagan had deemed that the cold war and the atomic bomb's existence made Ezekiel's prophecy realizable....

If today the University of Lausanne reveals these explanations Thomas Römer supplied to Jacques Chirac, it's because the latter has left the Elysée. For Jocelyn Rochat, this little international policy professional secret raises a vast question: our lack of religious education, our ignorance of Scriptures at a time when religious foundations are far more crucial than we'd like to believe in political and military decisions. Religion is not confined to the private sphere, Jocelyn Rochat concludes. A parameter to take into account "at the risk of no longer understanding the way the world works today." ¶

.....
Quote
.....
If I have any beliefs about immortality, it is that certain dogs I have known will go to heaven, and very, very few persons.
.....
- James Thurber Unquote

Against the grain: There are questions that science cannot answer. Mary Midgley argues opponents of intelligent design are driving people to accept it.

Interview by Nick Jackson, 20 September 2007

People are not going to accept scientific fact if they think it is morally pernicious. When people are asked why they are persuaded by intelligent design, they often say that it's the only alternative to scientific atheism and Darwinism which are pernicious moral doctrines; they see it as the only refuge from this anti-human bloody-mindedness. It's at the level of attitudes to life that these choices are made. And people will think scientists as a whole believe this. As Professor Winston has said, science becomes discredited by this kind of stuff.

Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) explicitly says that there are no other positions available except for his own and creationism, but these are both highly eccentric positions. Dawkins says that natural selection is the only source of evolution. But Darwin himself said that natural selection was not the only source of evolution.

Dawkins dramatises natural selection by the use of the word selfish. He says that natural selection means nature red in tooth and claw, but that's not true. Natural selection means using something that others are not, like photosynthesis or a new food source, and we must not forget that co-operation is often terribly important for survival.

The ideology Dawkins is selling is the worship of competition. It is projecting a Thatcherite take on economics of evolution. It's not an impartial scientific view; it's a political drama. It is wrong to link science with this one-sided contemptuous stuff, as if making out that people who disagree with him are idiots. There are many believing scientists. It's very misleading to reduce the debate to this level.

Dawkins' idea that religion makes people do appalling things is absurd. Whatever is the favoured thought system at any time, people doing appalling things use it to justify themselves. Marxism was used in this way, monetarist ideology is the same. It's all political. When you build it up to cosmic doctrines, you're taking on a much bigger responsibility.

Belief does not compete with science; it means different things. Dawkins is very angry with anyone who says there are mysteries, but science cannot answer some questions. We raise all sorts of questions beyond the material world. Then it's understanding we're after rather than information. These are not questions like "is there a box on the table?" but questions of inner life, that can't be settled in the lab.

Mary Midgley's Impact Pamphlet *Intelligent Design and Other Ideological Problems* will be launched with a debate on 3 October at King's College, London. ¶



FIG LEAVES



FINANCIAL SITUATION OF FIG

In order to inform our members about FIG's financial situation, our retiring Treasurer Bill O'Kain has prepared this analysis of our income and expenses for the last two years. It shows that FIG has operated at a loss of over \$1000 for each of the last two years ending on September 30. We have about \$2000 on hand as of September 30, 2007, so if income and expenses continue the way they are going, in the future we will have to limit some of our activities.

The FIG Board will do what it can to cut expenses consistent with bringing you important services such as our meetings and our newsletter, *FigLeaves*. For example, we will seek to reduce the costs associated with bringing in out-of-town speakers. We are exploring fund raising opportunities provided by local merchants. Elsewhere in this issue we invite you to consider getting *FigLeaves* online to save printing and postage.

You can help with your contributions. The schedule shows you gave over \$300 more in 2007 than in the prior year. You can make a contribution anytime by sending a check to FIG at our P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. You will have another opportunity in a few weeks when we send out our annual request for membership renewals and contributions. FIG has Section 501(c)(3) approval from the IRS so your contributions qualify as tax deductible.

Being American

Being American is about driving a German car to an Irish pub for a Mexican beer, then traveling home, grabbing an Indian curry or a Turkish shish-kebab on the way, to sit down on Danish furniture and British shows on a Japanese large-screen plasma t.v. And the most American thing of all: Suspicion of anything foreign!



Oh, yes, and only in America can an Italian pizza made by a Greek chef reach your house faster than an ambulance.

Only in America do supermarkets make sick people walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions, while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front.

Only in America do people order double cheese-burgers, large fries (super sized) and a Diet soft drink.

Only in America do we use answering machines to screen calls and then have call waiting so we won't miss a call from someone we didn't want to talk to in the first place.

Only in America do we leave vehicles worth tens of thousands of dollars in the driveway and lock our junk and cheap lawn mower in the garage.

Kind of makes you proud to be an American, doesn't it.

Women's health:

We know that five men don't know better than women and their doctors what's best for women's health. We know that a woman's right to make a decision about how many children to have and when, without government interference, is one of the most fundamental freedoms we have in this country.

- Barack Obama (July 2007)

SCIENCE BOOK CLUB: 2007 Schedule

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 because of holidays or other conflicts as noted below:

Oct. 28 - *Facts and mysteries in elementary particle physics* by Martinus J.G. Veltman

Nov. 18 (3rd Sunday) - *What we believe but cannot prove : today's leading thinkers on science in the age of certainty* edited by John Brockman

Dec. 16 (3rd Sunday) - *The Republican war on science* by Chis Mooney





At last a Comic Book Atheist hero

by Matthew Chapman, *Huffington Post*, 8 August 2007

Pat Tillman, an extraordinarily square-jawed football player who gave up a lucrative professional life to go and fight for his country, was at first hailed as a hero by a military eager for good publicity. When it was discovered Tillman died as a result of "friendly fire" -- he was shot at close range in the forehead, which seems a little too friendly -- his family pressed hard for a more thorough investigation.

Lt. Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich, an officer with responsibilities for Tillman's unit, complained that his relatives were being so insistent because, like Pat, they were atheists. They could not come to terms with his death. From their perspective, after all, Pat was merely "wormdirt". In other words, if they believed in God and an afterlife they would be more compliant.

An interesting point.

America, the most religious country among all the developed nations, does have a puzzling willingness to tolerate injustices which, particularly given the country's great wealth, should be considered intolerable. If God exists, he's doing a lousy job, so much so that one wonders if life might improve if we stopped believing in him and started doing some of the heavy lifting ourselves. Might Americans, for example, suddenly see that it is insane not to have a health care system that works, or that there is something wrong about a country wherein some people are billionaires while others can barely afford to eat? In short, might reality snap into focus?

You may argue that one thing has nothing to do with the other, but you can't have it both ways. You can't say that religious faith has a real effect and at the same time say that extracting it would have no effect.

Of course, people can and do have it both ways. When prayers are answered, God is credited and thanked. When God fails, the devotee questions his own faith not God's existence. Heads God wins, tails you lose. Exempt from this equation -- by definition, in my view -- is an accurate analysis of existence. To quote Voltaire, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." If you want to read a compendium of religiously engendered "atrocities" read Christopher Hitchens's superb book, *God Is Not Great*, which reminds you of them in accumulatively shocking detail.

Because I have written on the subject of religion, I often talk to people about faith. I rarely meet anyone

who thinks as I do. Even at the skeptical end, I usually find, if I probe a little, that people believe "there has to be something," some force, some supernatural meaning. Finally, and always, comes the fear of oblivion. There must be some kind of afterlife. "This can't just be it," is the final plaintive but insistent appeal.

Why not? What evidence exists for any of these ideas? Why this God as opposed to that one? If one is invented, why not all? But reason is no match for fear and never will be. Perhaps if it is fear itself that one must fear (and I do -- fear so often turns to violence), then maybe fear itself is what should be attacked. If attacking the idiocies of faith has no chance, perhaps an appeal to good, old-fashioned American machismo will do the trick instead.

Here I return to Pat Tillman. When Tillman went to war, he knew he was alone and finite. When he contemplated the possibility of getting killed, he did not see angels and fluffy clouds beyond that moment, but utter darkness. He required no guarantees of ultimate survival before he jumped in. In fact, according to credible reports, the very last words he spoke were to a nearby soldier who was lying on the ground crying out to God for help. "Would you shut your (expletive) mouth?" yelled Tillman. "God's not going to help you. You need to do something for yourself, you sniveling..."

With his comic-book good looks and dialogue to match, perhaps Tillman can provide a role model for young atheists. A real hero with real courage, he not only refutes forever the lie that there are no atheists in foxholes, but more than that provides an opening for a far more radical thought: atheism, in and of itself, is courageous, and faith, in and of itself, is cowardly. ☼

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• Quote

• The President probably still believes, deep down,

• as do many of his admirers, that the righteous, reli-

• gious vision he brings to geopolitics is a source of

• strength-- almost as if the less he knows about the

• issues the better and the truer his decision-making

• will be. . . . How much easier and cleaner to make

• decisions in consultation with a higher authority.

• - David Halberstam, "The History Boys"

• *Vanity Fair* (August 2007)

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• Unquote

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October Potluck:
 Tuesday Oct. 9, 2007 6:30 PM
 November Potluck:
 Tuesday Nov. 13, 2007 6:30 PM



October Meeting
 Sunday, OCT. 28, 2007
 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 visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.