

FIG LEAVES

Volume 20 Issue 10

October 2011



FIG 20TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

FREE INQUIRY GROUP
OF CINCINNATI AND NORTHERN KENTUCKY

Saturday October 15, 2011 (10 AM - 8:30 PM)

Sunday October 16, 2011 (9:30 AM - 5 PM)

Doubletree Inn at the Cincinnati Airport
(Hilton Airport Hotel)

2826 Terminal Drive in Hebron, KY.

Camp Quest activities for kids 7-16



Featuring

- P.Z. Myers** Biologist and blogger on
freethoughtblogs.com/pharyngula
- David Silverman** President of American Atheists
- Greta Christina** Author, blogger, correspondent for
alternet.org
- Jamila Bey** Comedian, journalist, blogger on
atheistnexus.org
- Tom Flynn** Editor of *Free Inquiry Magazine*
- Darrell Ray** Author of *The God Virus* and founder of Re-
covering From Religion
- J.T. Eberhard** Co-founder of Skepticon, Campus Organizer
for Secular Student Alliance



Thus saith the LORD of hosts; "Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil."

- Jeremiah 29:17

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Events

FIG@20 Celebration

Saturday & Sunday October 15-16
Doubletree Hotel
2826 Terminal Drive; Hebron, KY.

November Meeting

Tues. November. 01, at 7:00 PM
The Hannaford Suites Hotel



Call 888-470-6614 for Hotel
room reservations.

Symposium prices and
registration at
<http://fig20.eventbrite.com>
to register online.
(pay using PayPal)





Celebrating Twenty Years

In 1991, the Free Inquiry Group of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky was founded.

You are welcome to join us as we celebrate 20 years of education, activism and friendships.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Saturday October 15

- 10:00 - 11:00** Registration
- 11:00 - 12:15** Welcome/Opening Speaker- Greta Christina
- 12:15 - 1:15** Lunch (Grab and go lunches will be available to eat inside or outside the venue and chat with new and old friends)
- 1:15 - 2:00** Speaker: Bill Jensen, History of Freethought in Cincinnati
- 2:00 - 2:15** Break
- 2:15 - 3:00** Speaker: Jamila Bay
- 3:00 - 3:15** Break
- 3:15 - 4:00** Speaker: J.T. Eberhart
- 4:00 - 4:15** Break
- 4:15 - 5:00** Speaker: Dr. Darrel Ray
- 5:00 - 6:00** Networking Break
- 6:00 - 8:30** Dinner - Highlighting FIG's 20 Year History and Impact. Special Remarks from Tom Flynn and Tim Madigan - First Speakers to FIG in 1991

Sunday, October 16

- 9:30 - 12:30** Leadership Summit - facilitated by Dr. Darrell Ray (*For Leaders of Freethought Groups Only*)
 - 10:30 - 12:30** Networking Brunch - Hotel Cafe
 - 12:30 - 1:45** Panel - Reflections on FIG@20 - State of Freethought Today
 - 1:45 - 2:00** Break
 - 2:00 - 3:15** Speaker - Rabbi Robert Barr
 - 3:15 - 3:30** Break
 - 3:30 - 5:00** Final Speaker; Closing - PZ Myers
- Questions - Please contact figcincinnati@gmail.com.



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](mailto:gofigger@figleaves.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:

1 January to 31 December.

One year: \$30

Family: \$40

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.



September Meeting

Remembrances of FIG

During the September Free Inquiry Group meeting, members of the group sat in a circle to take turns discussing their memories and experiences with the FIG group. The questions asked: how they heard of the group, why they decided to join and what they enjoy about being a part of it. Joe Levy started the meeting off by revealing a few details of how he formed the group. After moving to Cincinnati for his career, he was unable to find any groups that catered to free thinkers. With some help, he decided to start a group. Joe will reveal more details at the anniversary event about the founding of FIG. Joe's wife Barbara stated, "The Free Inquiry Group has been an important part of our lives for twenty years."

A few common themes ran through the meeting. Most of the participants started out by saying that they didn't know that there were groups for freethinkers to join, especially in Cincinnati. Some even went so far as to say they thought that they were the only atheists in the city or that no one else thought the way that they did. Many feel that the group has broadened their horizons. "It was like opening a window shade on the world," Edwin Kagin said, when he and his late wife, Helen, were able to spend time and share ideas with others who lived free of superstitious dogma.

Sharing ideas is a huge part of the Free Inquiry Group. Many members stated that they like the format of FIG meetings. A formal setting where a speaker shares ideas and opinions is an educational experience that many value. After experiencing religious indoctrination during childhood, it is an exhilarating and liberating experience to hear ideas resulting from the exploration of intelligent humans. Over the years the Free Inquiry Group has featured topics such as evolution, history, psychology, ecology, and religion delivered by experts in their respective fields. The question and answer part of the program is usually filled with insightful questions and lively discussion.

For those who have lost their faith and the community they had with their religion, FIG has provided a lifeline of sorts. It is a place where people can come to express their concerns about the over emphasis on religion in society, family and politics. Among FIG members, there is a safe haven for those who are critical of religion and its teachings. These are common grounds where FIG members can be open and honest about their thoughts

without fear of reprisal or ostracism. The future of free thought is another area where members can express their opinions and discuss options and strategies for making society more rational. In addition, as Bryan Sellers said, "Who else can you talk to about atheism?"

The integrity of non-believers was apparent at the meeting. Unable to pretend and feign belief, FIG members have lost friends and relationships with relatives by speaking their minds and being honest and open about their non-belief. There is a need to withhold your opinions on religion in a business setting and our members usually do. Proclaiming yourself a non-believer at work or with clients could jeopardize your job and affect your finances. Nevertheless, with people you care about it is most important to be honest and forthcoming about yourself and your perception of the world.

Another feature of this meeting and a characteristic of FIG meetings is the sense of humor that is apparent among the group members. The relaxed atmosphere of like-minded people leads to a lot of joking and good-natured banter among the members. There is a feeling of (dare I say?) fellowship (it sounds churchy) and camaraderie that prevails. Some jokes are made at the expense of religion but we also joke about each other, politics and other topics.

A few people were attracted to FIG by the billboard erected by the Cincinnati Coalition of Reason, (CINCoR), of which FIG is a member. Some first joined FIG after being referred by members of the Cincinnati Atheist Meetup Group. Others did searches on the internet to seek out free thought groups in the area. Some were and are attracted to our science programs.

The Free Inquiry Group is a place where people can interact with others who reject the ideas of religion and identify with freethinking, intelligent and curious people. It is great to see honest and open communication in a group setting such as we had at this meeting. Everyone was willing to discuss their thoughts and expose their feelings by revealing things in public that they have never talked to anyone else about before. This open and honest discourse and the feeling of community that it encourages are perhaps the most special and valuable aspects of belonging to the Free Inquiry Group.

Our next meeting after the anniversary event, tentatively scheduled for November 1, 2011, will address the topic of the future of the Free Inquiry Group.

– reported by John Welte ☘



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



For this October issue of Contradiction Corner I will get in the mood of the season and point out some of the more bizarre and morbid scriptures found in the Bible. Most of these oddities are not what I would call contradictions but instead are more things that should make the believer stop and say, huh?

Much of the bizarre material in the Bible is related to sex. For example, read Deuteronomy 25:11-12 "When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets: Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her." Yes, if a married man happens to be in a wrestling match and his wife decides to grab his opponent by the privates (just to help out), off goes her hand. Makes you really wonder what brought about that little gem of scripture, doesn't it?

In Deuteronomy (22:28) we are also told that the sentence for raping an engaged or married woman is death; however, if she is a virgin she has to marry her assailant and they are never allowed to divorce. Another example of biblical family values is Deuteronomy 25:5-6 where a brother is obligated to have sex with his dead brother's wife if she is childless so she can have an offspring and the child is to be raised as the child of the widow's dead husband.

The book of Deuteronomy (23:1) also states (in graphic language) how that any males with genital defects are forbidden from entering the temple. Not to worry though, the same restriction applies to approaching an altar if you are lame, blind or have a flat nose (Leviticus 21:17-18)

Several biblical verses are so sexually explicit that I will not repeat them here, however you are free to look them up yourself, see Song of Solomon 2:3; 5:4; 7:7-9; Ezekiel 23:20-21.

There are many, many bizarre laws in the Bible, such as a law forbidding alters to have steps because God is afraid that someone might try to peek up the priests robes (Exodus 20:26.) There is a law forbidding clothing made from both linen and wool, mixing of two different crops in the same field, or allowing two different breeds of cattle to graze together (Leviticus 19:19).

Contrary to what Christians may believe, the biblical god is not very kind or loving to children. In fact, if little children were exposed to much of the Old Testament it would give them as many nightmares as any Hollywood film.

The book of Numbers, chapter 5, verses 11 to 31 gives Moses instructions to mix a "magic potion" of holy water and dirt from the temple floor. This special potion is to be given to a pregnant woman suspected of conceiving from a man other than her husband. After drinking this bitter water an innocent woman will conceive the child normally; however, if she were guilty her belly would swell and thigh rot, and by implication she would lose the child. Sounds like a chemically induced abortion to me, wonder if the right-to-life crowd knows about this?

2 Kings 2:23:24 tells this story, "And he went up from thence unto Beth-el: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Funny, I don't remember that being taught in Sunday school, being torn apart by bears feels more like Stephan King than the god presented in my Bible bedtime stories.

In Hosea 13:16 god is angry with Israel's capital Samaria, so angry in fact that he proclaims "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up." God also reveals bloodthirstiness for children in Hosea 9 and Isaiah 13:15-18. Finally I could also bring up the slaying of the firstborn in the last plague of Egypt (Exodus 12:29-30).

Finally, the Bible is a potpourri of the macabre with tales of cannibalism (2 Kings 6:25-29), being buried alive (Numbers 16:27-33), incest (Genesis 19:32), rape with incest (2 Samuel 13:1-22), sex slaves (Exodus 21:7-11) and gore beyond telling.

Perhaps the next time you gather with Christian family or friends you can work some of these more bizarre scriptures into the conversation... then again maybe not! Happy Halloween!





“God, No!” Penn Jillette Visits Cincinnati

Penn Jillette, the talkative member of the magic and comedy duo Penn and Teller, made an appearance at Joseph-Beth Booksellers to promote his new book, “God, No! Signs You May Already Be an Atheist and Other Magical Tales.” Penn spoke to a crowd of about one hundred people, autographed books, posed for photos and did an interview with *American Atheist Magazine* Editor Pam Whissel.



Penn began his talk by informing the crowd that he was inspired to write the book based on a suggestion from his friend, Glenn Beck. Yes, that Glenn Beck. What began as a rhetorical exercise evolved into a larger project. Beck was trying to force the incorrect idea that the Ten Commandments are just basic common sense. Recognizing the fact that other atheist authors, among them George Carlin and Christopher Hitchens, have conceived of their own atheistic commandments, Penn wanted to make the concept a personal and original statement on his thoughts about religion and life. The result is the sometimes thought provoking and often hilarious “God, No!”

Penn considers himself and others who answer the “god question” with “I don’t know” to be an atheist. If you have even a little doubt, he says, you cannot be a full-fledged faithful believer. There is no way that “I don’t know” leads to belief. That doesn’t mean that you think that god does not exist or that it is impossible for a god to exist. It states simply that you do not have any evidence for this existence; therefore, belief is impossible.

The book lists a Commandment followed by Penn’s version. This leads into a chapter or two illustrating the “Atheist Suggestion.” Or not. The chapters are stories and anecdotes from Penn’s life and are sometimes only vaguely related to the Suggestion. Nevertheless, they are worth the read because they are funny and/or touching and reveal the thoughts and feelings of a very intelligent, humorous and concerned human being. For example, the First Commandment is “Thou shalt have no others gods before me.” Penn’s Atheists First Suggestion is,

“The highest ideals are human intelligence, creativity and love. Respect these above all.” He then goes into reflections on Siegfried and Roy’s creativity and David Blaine’s “spiritualism.”

This is not meant to be a full review of the book since I have not read it all yet. However, I was impressed by Penn during his talk which showed his compassion for his fellow man and his fantastic and sometimes quirky sense of humor. The book is almost worth the price just for his telling of the weightless strip tease he managed to do aboard NASA’s “vomit comet,” which is used to train astronauts under weightless conditions. Unfortunately, you cannot see him act out this story as you could when he

related it during his talk. Hilarious!

⌘

Will Expertise Replace Empathy

© Vivian B. Kline

Three-year-old push button
To bring themselves cartoons.
Computers now fill libraries
Where there were only books.
Once telephones were on a wall
Now iPhones are transportable.
Lap-tops and kindles go trundling along
As Skype shows us each other.

Some oldsters still use pen and ink.
The postman brings them mail.
They don’t “spam” and things don’t “Crash”
But much they miss today.

Will friends be known through tweeting?
And face book show their face?
We won’t go back. Must forge ahead.
Forever: über alles?
But a kiss in person
And a hug so warm:
Those things last forever.



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Science Book Club

All the meetings are held at the downtown Cincinnati Library in Meeting Room 3A at 2:30 on the third Sunday of each month with the following exceptions:

Schedule for 2011:

October 16 - *What Have You Changed Your Mind About? Today's Leading Minds Rethink Everything* by John Brockman, ed, 2009, 387pp

November 20 - *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker, Pulitzer Prize, 1973, 314pp

December 18 - *The Dependent Gene: Fallacy of Nature vs. Nurture*, David S. Moore, 2002



October Science Café

Brahm Corstanje's Paranormal Theatre

When: Sunday, October 23, 2011 at 6:00 PM

Where: Dave and Buster's; 11775 Commons Drive; Springdale, OH 45246

As a very special October Science Café event, we will be having mentalist, magician, and community theatre actor Brahm Corstanje take us on a disturbing psychological journey to one of England's most notorious mental asylums. Performing under the moniker "The Haunted One", he provides a live haunted themed magic show in the form of a theatrical re-creation of extrasensory powers and spirit manifestations. This is a unique opportunity to see, live, what less scrupulous individuals have presented to the public -- and less informed researchers have accepted -- to be convincing evidence of the spiritual realm.



The Center for Inquiry Institute and CFI—Amherst are proud to host a two-day conference on:

Daniel Dennett and the Scientific Study of Religion

A Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* December 2-3, 2011

Center for Inquiry—Transnational
1310 Sweet Home Road
Amherst, NY

~••~

Daniel Dennett's 2006 book *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* is a bold vision of religion as an entirely natural phenomenon, amenable to study by the various social, behavioral, and cognitive sciences. The theme of this conference is the further pursuit of the scientific study of religion along the major lines

elaborated by Dennett, together with pioneering research that is presently advancing this important interdisciplinary effort.

Conference program is scheduled for:

Friday, December 2: 7pm-10pm

Saturday, December 3: 9am-9pm

Registration is \$79 for the public, \$59 for Friends of the Center, and \$29 for students (valid student ID required).

For more information about the CFI Institute, please visit our web site.

Specific questions? Email a CFI Institute representative or call us at (716) 636-4869 ext. 408.

CFI—Transnational is located directly across from the University at Buffalo's North Campus. Free parking is available at the Center



A Career Change

Thomas Heathfield was a well paid banking consultant with a promising career in Maidenhead, England, but gave it up this year to move to South Africa and endure rigorous training as a *sangoma*, a religious healer. After five months of studying the Seswati language,

sleeping in the bush, hunting for animal parts, vomiting up goats' blood and learning native dances, Heathfield, 32, was given a new name, Gogo Mndawe, and is now qualified to read bones and prescribe herbal cures. He admitted to some concern about his acceptance as a Englishman calling out African spirits, "but when the people see me dance, perhaps those questions go away."

There's the belief among the local people that vultures have magic powers. They believe that vultures have supernatural eyesight that is not only able to find food over vast distances, but is so good that they can actually see tomorrow. In other words, see into the future. *Sangomas*, as witch doctors prefer to be called, have been selling vulture heads for a small fortune to eager gamblers who believe that they are lucky charms that will enable them to see into the future, their talisman to predict the winning numbers. The market for vulture parts has skyrocketed in the past few years.

- *Funny Times*, October 2011, p. 15

- Deon Meyer, *Blood Safari*, p. 63

Recent Religious Decisions

The notorious Santa Croce monastery in Rome was closed, and converted to an ordinary church, on orders from the Vatican following reports about Sister Anna Nobili, a former lap-dancer who taught other nuns her skills and who was once seen lying spread-eagled before an altar clutching a crucifix. Santa Croce was also an embarrassment for its luxury hotel, which had become a mecca for celebrities visiting Rome.

- *Funny Times*, October 2011, p. 15



Daughter: "After my parents divorce, I got custody of my Dad."



GOP Debaters Get It Wrong, Don't Care

by Matt Taibbi, *Rolling Stone*, September 23, 9:44 AM ET

Enjoyed this news story this morning about a new study by Amitai Shenhav of Harvard University, seeking to determine what characteristics are likely to predetermine belief in a Supreme Being. Shenhav concluded that people who are more "intuitive" are more likely to believe in God. An example:

Shenhav and his colleagues investigated that question in a series of studies. In the first, 882 American adults answered online surveys about their belief in God. Next, the participants took a three-question math test with questions such as, "A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?"

The intuitive answer to that question is 10 cents, since most people's first impulse is to knock \$1 off the total. But people who use "reflective" reasoning to question their first impulse are more likely to get the correct answer: 5 cents.

I noted with amusement that they took great care to pitch these results a certain way. After all, they could have headlined the news reports like this:

People who don't think, get shit wrong, tend to believe in god

Or maybe:

Study: don't hire believers to be cashiers

I keep waiting for some scientist to take that plunge there with a study like this, but still nobody will. Instead, the Harvard team went right to the edge and pulled back: "It's not that one way is better than the other," study researcher David Rand of Harvard said in a statement. "Intuitions are important and reflection is important, and you want some balance of the two. Where you are on that spectrum affects how you come out in terms of belief in God."

Right, of course. Anyway, I'm procrastinating ... writing a Perry feature and clicked on to this God story while reviewing the results of last night's highly entertaining getting-shit-wrong fest in the Republican debate. It's hard not to notice a new trend in the Republican race this year, which is that candidates are increasingly unconcerned about being factually wrong on live television.

I'm not so sure the two stories aren't connected. There's an awful lot of "intuitive" politics on the Republican side this year, where insistence upon objective consistency is somehow made to feel atheist and unreasonable. It's not so much what Rick Perry actually said about Social Security in the past that matters: what's more important is what you think it is, at first glance ...





Pat Tillman's Atheism

by Michael Shermer, 13 September 2011

In the 2010 documentary film, *The Tillman Story*, the story of Pat Tillman and his tragic death at the hands of “friendly fire” is retold. Tillman was the NFL star who gave it all up to join the military cause in Afghanistan after being inspired by 9/11 to do something for his country. He did not do it for the glory or publicity, and gave up a lucrative football career for what he perceived to be a worthy cause. After his death the U.S. government implemented a publicity campaign to use Tillman's death as a tool to promote the war as a cause so worthy that even a highly-paid NFL star believed it to be worth the sacrifice. What the government failed to mention is that Tillman was killed at the hands of his fellow soldiers during a “fog of war” incident in a steep and narrow slot canyon in which there was much confusion about where enemy fire was originating. It's a very disturbing film to watch—infuriating in fact—and Jon Krakauer's book, *Where Men Win Glory*, presents the story in excruciating detail in a compelling narrative.

Pat Tillman was an atheist. At his funeral his younger brother Richard got up to speak, visibly upset, noticeably inebriated, and with beer in hand proceeded to thank everyone for their warm sentiments, but upbraided those like Maria Shriver and Senator John McCain who made religious overtones in their sentiments, noting about his brother Pat: “He's not with God, he's fucking dead. He's not religious. Thanks for your thoughts, but he's fucking dead.”

Later in the film there is a radio interview presented with Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich, who was the Regimental Executive Officer at Forward Operating Base Salerno on Khost, Afghanistan, under which Tillman was serving at the time of his death, and who led the military investigation into Pat's death. I found the following exchange to be among the most disturbing things in the entire film that was missed by most reviewers, starting in reference to the grieving Tillman family who were at the time vigorously pursuing an investigation into Pat's death and the government cover up of it:

Kauzlarich: “These people are having a hard time letting it go. It may be because of their religious beliefs. I don't know how an atheist thinks, but I can only imagine that that would be

pretty tough. If you're an atheist and you don't believe in anything, if you die what is there to go to? Nothing. You're worm dirt. It's pretty hard to get your head around that.”

Host: “So you suspect that's probably the reason this thing ‘the family's persistence in getting to the bottom of Pat's death’ is running on.”

Kauzlarich: “I think so. There's not a whole lot of trust in the system or faith in the system.”

So...if you're an atheist it means that you're not going to buy into the belief that death—even a tragic, unnecessary, and friendly-fire death—will somehow be made acceptable by the belief that all will be made right in heaven where all the good Conservative Christian soldiers will meet up once again. This is very disturbing. What this knucklehead nincompoop is saying is that if the Tillman family were good Christians they would have gone along with the patriotic platitudes of the military in assuaging everyone's grief by pretending that it was all done in the name of god and country. But since the Tillmans are atheists it means that they actually want truth and justice now! How inconvenient. How pathetic. And this is yet another point against religious belief: it leads you to blur your focus on the here-and-now and let slip your grip on reality, and allow yourself to be manipulated by those who have neither the conscience nor the courage to stand up for what is right and true. ☚



Little Johnny was asked by his mother what he had learned in Sunday School.

“Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then he used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge and saved the Israelites.



“Is that really what your teacher taught you?”

“Well, no. Mom, but if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it.”





Is The GOP A Religion?

By Andrew Sullivan, *The Daily Beast*, 12 September 11

The Dish covered the remarkable web essay of Mike Lofgren, but I didn't comment myself because it so closely follows my own argument in "The Conservative Soul" and on this blog, that it felt somewhat superfluous. But I want to draw attention to the crux of the piece, because if we are to understand how the right became so unmoored from prudence, moderation and tradition and became so infatuated with recklessness, extremism and revolution, we need to understand how it happened.

It is, of course, as my shrink never fails to point out, multi-determined. But here is Lofgren's attempt at a Rosebud:

How did the whole toxic stew of GOP beliefs - economic royalism, militarism and culture wars cum fundamentalism - come completely to displace an erstwhile civilized Eisenhower Republicanism?

It is my view that the rise of politicized religious fundamentalism (which is a subset of the decline of rational problem solving in America) may have been the key ingredient of the takeover of the Republican Party. For politicized religion provides a substrate of beliefs that rationalizes - at least in the minds of followers - all three of the GOP's main tenets.

That too is my view: that the GOP, deep down, is behaving as a religious movement, not as a political party, and a radical religious movement at that. Lofgren sees the "Prosperity Gospel" as a divine blessing for personal enrichment and minimal taxation (yes, that kind of Gospel is compatible with Rand, just not compatible with the actual Gospels); for military power (with a major emphasis on the punitive, interventionist God of the Old Testament); and for radical change and contempt for existing institutions (as a product of End-Times thinking, intensified after 9/11).

Lofgren argues that supply-side economics attaches to the fundamentalist worldview purely by coalition necessity. The fundamentalists are not that interested in debt or economics (they sure didn't give a damn as spending exploded under Bush) but if their coalition partners insist on a certain economic doctrine, they'll easily go along with it, as long as it is never compromised. If it's presented as eternal dogma, they can handle it - and defend it with gusto. If it also means that Obama is wrong, so much the better. Most theo-political movements need

an anti-Christ of some sort; and Obama - even though he is the most demonstrably Christian president since Carter - fills the role.

And so this political deadlock conceals a religious war at its heart. Why after all should one abandon or compromise sacred truths? And for those whose Christianity can only be sustained by denial of modern complexity, of scientific knowledge, and of what scholarly studies of the Bible's origins have revealed, this fusion of political and spiritual lives into one seamless sensibility and culture, is irresistible. And public reminders of modernity - that, say, many Americans do not celebrate Christmas, that gay people have human needs, that America will soon be a majority-minority country and China will overtake the US in GDP by mid-century - are terribly threatening.

But all these nuances do not therefore vanish. The gays don't disappear. China keeps growing. The population becomes browner and browner. Women's lives increasingly become individual choices not social fates. And this enrages and terrifies the fundamentalist even more. Hence the occasional physical lashing out - think Breivik or McVeigh - but more profoundly, the constant endless insatiable cultural lashing out at the "elites" who have left fundamentalism behind, and have, on many core issues, science on their side. So within this religious core, and fundamentalist mindset, you also have the steely solder of resentment, intensified even further by a period of white middle and working class decline and economic crisis.

That's how I explain the current GOP. It can only think in doctrines, because the alternative is living in a complicated, global, modern world they both do not understand and also despise. Taxes are therefore always bad. Government is never good. Foreign enemies must be pre-emptively attacked. Islam is not a religion. Climate change is an elite conspiracy to impoverish America. Terror suspects are terrorists. When Americans torture, it is not torture. When Christians murder, they are not Christians. And if you change your mind on any of these issues, you are a liberal, an apostate, and will be attacked.

If your view of conservatism is one rooted in an instinctual, but agile, defense of tradition, in a belief in practical wisdom that alters constantly with circumstance, in moderation and the defense of the middle class as the stabilizing ballast of democracy, in limited but





strong government ... then the GOP is no longer your party (or mine).

Religion has replaced all of this, reordered it, and imbued the entire political-economic-religious package with zeal. And the zealous never compromise. They don't even listen.

Think of Michele Bachmann's wide-eyed, Stepford stare as she waits for a questioner to finish before providing another pre-cooked doctrinal nugget. My fear - and it has building for a decade and a half, because I've seen this movement up-close from within and also on the front lines of the marriage wars - is that once one party becomes a church with unchangeable doctrines, and once it has supplanted respect for institutions and civility with the radical pursuit of timeless doctrines and hatred of governing institutions, then our democracy is in grave danger.

If you ask why I remain such a strong Obama supporter, it is because I see him as that rare individual able to withstand the zeal without becoming a zealot in response, and to overcome the recklessness of pure religious ideology with pragmatism, civility and reason. That's why they fear and loathe him. Not because his policies are not theirs'. But because his temperament is their nemesis. If he defeats them next year, they will break, because their beliefs are so brittle, but will then reform, along Huntsman-style lines. If they defeat him, I fear we will no longer be participating in a civil conversation, however fraught, but in a civil war. ☘



The biology professor at a posh girl's school calls on Miss Smith to name the organ in the human body which, under the appropriate conditions, expands to six times its normal size? And to define the conditions.



"Sir," the student gasps, "I don't think that is a proper question to ask me. I assure you my parents will hear of this." With that she sits down red faced.

Unperturbed the teacher asks Miss Jones the same question. With complete composure she replies, "Why, of course, it is the pupil of the eye, which expands sixfold in dim light."

"Correct," says the teacher. Now, Miss Smith, I have three things to say to you: one, you have not studied your lesson. Two, you have a dirty mind. And three, you will someday be faced with a dreadful disappointment."



Forged: Writing in the Name of God
— *Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*
by Bart D. Ehrman
(New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011)
reviewed by Tim Callahan

It is widely understood that the gospels designated Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were not written by the various disciples and apostles bearing those names. Instead, these names were rather arbitrarily assigned to the four canonical gospels. It is less widely known that the epistles 1 and 2 Peter were almost certainly not written by that famous disciple of Jesus. Likewise, Jude, supposedly a brother of Jesus, did not write the short epistle bearing his name; and, in all probability, whatever "John" may have written the three epistles and gospel now bearing his name, it was not the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (see the Gospel of John 13:23-25; 19:26; 21:7, 20, 24). Jude can be reliably dated to the 2nd century, past the time any brother of Jesus could have been alive. One reason the disciples Peter and John probably didn't write the epistles 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John and the Gospel of John, is that—assuming them to be historical—they were, in all probability, as the biblical scholar Bart Ehrman notes in his new book *Forged*, illiterate. With illiteracy rates in ancient times estimated to be 90% of the population or more, it is highly unlikely that fishermen were among those who could read or write.

Of course, Paul, as a learned Pharisee and official would have been literate, and a number of the letters bearing his name were, in all probability, written by him. Ehrman notes (p. 93) that at least seven of the Pauline letters are genuinely from his hand. These are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. What most of the lay public doesn't know is that many letters attributed to him, even purporting in their texts to be written by him, were not. These include what are referred to as the Pastoral Letters, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. Additionally, Colossians, Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians were probably not written by Paul, though they, along with the pastoral letters purport to be by him. Thus, of the 13 canonical letters claiming to be written by Paul, nearly half—often referred to as "Deutero-Pauline"—were not, and are, in →



fact, *forgeries*.

In *Forged*, Bart Ehrman deals not only with the evidence that many influential canonical and non-canonical works were forgeries, but also with the inability of many Christian apologists to deal with this embarrassing fact. Rationalizations abound for why 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2 and 3 John; Jude; and the six Deutero-Pauline letters really weren't forgeries, even though they were, and really are still inspired, despite the dishonesty of falsely claiming apostolic authorship. Ehrman rather effortlessly tears these rationalizations to pieces, pointing out that most of them are unsupported by even a shred of evidence. Among the rationalizations are the following: It was acceptable in ancient times to write under the name of one's mentor. The letters were often written by secretaries, who were allowed to add their own words and phrases. It was acceptable in ancient times to write in the name of another, well known author. As to the last of these, Ehrman points out that both forgery and plagiarism, though not illegal in Roman times, were considered reprehensible.

Often, the forgers even put forward a theology in opposition to that held by the apostle whose name they were using. In the case of Paul, both canonical and non-canonical letters and books forged in his name ran the gamut of theological positions, from the intrusive passage inserted into 1 Corinthians telling women to shut up in church (1 Cor. 14:34, 35), followed by 1 Timothy going to great lengths to establish a male dominated hierarchy (1 Tim. 2:11-15) to the non-canonical *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in which a female companion of Paul's named Thecla has great authority and power. The content and teaching of many of the Deutero-Pauline letters, particularly the Pastoral Letters directly contradicts what Paul says in 1 Corinthians about marriage. In 1 Cor. 7:25-40, while Paul grudgingly concedes that it isn't a sin to marry, he sees it as an impediment. Married people are more concerned with pleasing their spouses than having concern for God. Paul also says that, if possible married couples should try to be celibate (1 Cor. 7:29): "I mean, brethren, that the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none." Written by Paul ca. CE 60, 1 Corinthians echoes the view held by the Christians of that time that their generation would be the last before Jesus returned and the world ended, hence Paul's obsession with celibacy and renunciation. Yet, 1 Timothy is very concerned about family life and says, despite their many faults, there is a way for them to be saved (1 Tim. 2:15, emphasis added): "Yet woman will be saved through *bearing children*, if she

continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." Ehrman notes that this is in stark contrast to Paul's bare toleration of marriage and his admonition in 1 Corinthians that the end of the world was nigh.

Just as whole books were forged, sections of books not themselves forged also bear forged sections. These include not only the intrusive passage in 1 Corinthians, mentioned above, but as well a longer ending to the Gospel of Mark, in which there are post resurrection appearances by the risen Christ. Another such intrusion is the much beloved tale in the Gospel of John of the woman taken in adultery. Remove this story from the text and the material before and after it flows smoothly. The story is also missing from the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John.

Forgery continues to plague believers to this day through the codification of the New Testament canon. In the final chapter of *Forged*, Ehrman deals with a number of popular 19th and 20th century fabrications. Among these is *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* (1894) in which the author, Russian war correspondent Nicholas Notovitch, claimed to have found proof in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery that when Jesus was 13 he joined a caravan to India, studied under Brahmins for six years, learning their holy books, the Vedas, but found himself appalled by the caste system. In order to save himself from being murdered by the Brahmins, Jesus fled to a community of Buddhists and learned Theravada Buddhism. At age 29 he returned to Palestine, armed with the sacred knowledge of the mysterious east. The book and the claims of Notovitch that he found records of the life of the young Jesus in Tibet were a complete hoax. Although it was exposed as such, it nevertheless generated a whole mythos of Jesus visiting India and Tibet and getting his theology from Buddhist monks. Other modern fabrications include *The Long-Lost Second Book of Acts*, in which Mary the mother of Jesus, teaches the disciples a secret doctrine of reincarnation, *The Confession of Pontius Pilate*, in which Mary Magdalene presents Roman emperor Tiberius with an Easter egg dyed red, and *The Gospel of the Twelve*, in which Jesus espouses strict vegetarianism.

One of the strongest points Ehrman makes in this book is that Christian apologists, forced to defend the Bible as divinely inspired, tend to give the canonical forgeries a free pass, avoiding the issue of forgery—meaning lying—through their many rationalizations. As with Ehrman's earlier books, such as *Misquoting Jesus* and *God's Problem*, *Forged* is readily accessible to the lay public and clear in presenting the ways in which we know how the Bible was written and who wrote it.





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Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.