

FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 6

June 2006

June FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 27 June 7:00 PM

The Errors, Contradictions and Fallacies of the Bible

Dennis McKinsey

Dennis McKinsey is the author of two books covering the contradictions and errors of Biblical Scriptures, *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* and *Biblical Errancy: A Reference Guide*. At our meeting, Dennis will explore these errors of Biblical Scriptures and how these messages can be used to counter Fundamentalism.

Dennis can be heard on a weekly radio program on Sunday nights at www.freethoughtmedia.com.

Dennis lives in Hilliard, OH, and distributes a series of one hundred 30-minute video tapes exploring the issues raised in his books. He is working to disseminate these videotapes to Freethought groups around the country, so they can be played on local Public Access channels to offset the growing tide of televangelism.

July Meeting: Fred Edwords will address FIG on **Sunday 23 July at 2pm**. Fred is the Director of Communications at the American Humanist Society and serves as Board Chair for Camp Quest.

The Saga of Freethought and Its Pioneers-- Religious Critique and Social Reform

Drawing from ancient Greek and Roman writers who had boldly criticized the religions of their day, and drawing as well from Elizabethan era authors in Great Britain and on the continent, the French *philosophes* and other eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers launched the modern freethought movement. As with the Enlightenment itself, freethought wasn't merely about critique of religion but also about social reform. Freethinkers challenged the divine right of kings, sought an end to cruel and unusual punishment, and advanced civil and social rights--efforts which reached their peak, and excess, during the French Revolution. This tradition of critique and social reform continued through the nineteenth century in ways that led to modernism in religion and to a broad range of social reform movements including those for liberal studies in public schools, sex education, birth control, women's rights, anti-slavery, animal protection, child protection, poverty relief, and improved labor conditions. In this context, the social reform work of a leading Virginia Ethical Culturist, Moncure Conway, was notable, leading to a famous Ohio community of former slaves. One prominent freethought cause was anti-censorship--an effort which has extended from the late eighteenth century to the present time. But there were downsides and absurd offshoots as well: including eugenics, utopian experiments, Bolshevism, and even spiritualism and Theosophy.

August Meeting: PICNIC at the Kagins - Join us!

September Meeting: Tim Madigan will come in September and speak during the weekend of Oktoberfest.

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Events

(Watch the dates!)

June Meeting

Tuesday, 27 June 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

July Potluck

Tuesday, 11 June, 2006
6:30 PM at the Panera Restaurant
8420 Winton Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45231

Purchase your dinner, then join us in the Community Room. Our reservation is from 6 PM to 9 PM. For Map & Directions; see page 4

July Meeting

Sunday, 23 July 2006
2:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

Something different!

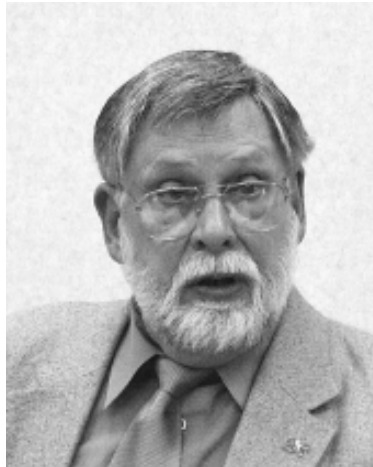


May Meeting...

Defending the Wall of Separation against the Battering Rams of Fundangelicalism.

Edwin Kagin, Esq.

Edwin started off with humor. He mentioned that his wife, Helen, is a retired anesthesiologist and referred to a tee shirt he had seen that said: "sleep better with an anesthesiologist." He then shifted to a more serious topic that is causing him a great deal of concern. He has been practicing law for thirty five years and he is quite frankly getting a little frightened about some of the things that are going on in our great land. Some of these things are not supposed to happen. Ed quoted Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, "the law is not a brooding omnipotence in the sky, it is what judges say it is and nothing more complex."



Edwin Kagin, Esq.

"The way things are going in the law, I feel much the way young Lord Coke did when before a particularly harsh judge. The judge looked at him and said: 'Young man, are you trying to show your contempt for this court?' Lord Coke replied, 'Oh no, your worship, I'm trying to conceal it.' That is the way I feel about some of the stuff that is going on these days."

There is widespread misunderstanding, lack of knowledge, or just plain lies about how the law really works, and what American democracy is all about. "I will teach you tonight the difference between the concepts unlawful and illegal. Unlawful means contrary to an existing law and *ill eagle* is a sick bird."

There was a case where a young lawyer was arguing before the Supreme Court and the Chief Justice retorted: "I don't believe that is the law!" The lawyer replied: "It was, your worship, until you just said that." Ed wants us to understand the meaning of what Oliver Wendell Holmes said. The Supreme Court may not always be right but they are always final. That is why it is true that whatever the Supreme Court rules we must abide by, because that is the way the way the system works and not to do so would be unthinkable. However, some of the opinions being expressed today by fools are really quite disturbing. It is the kind of thing that would be better if they kept their mouths shut and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.

In the case of Gore vs. Bush which decided the 2001 election, they ruled that the State of Florida had misread its own constitution, and therefore, ordered the recount of the ballots to be halted, thereby giving the electoral votes to Bush. The Supreme Court has had a long-standing tradition of not ruling on the constitutionality of a state constitution. Yet that is what they did in this case. Justice John Paul Stevens dissented and his eloquent dissent can be read on line.

"I went to school when civics and geography were still taught. Today that is no longer the case. Ambrose Bierce observed that wars are God's way of teaching Americans geography." Since people rarely study civics they really don't understand the basis of our



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figleaves@fuse.net;

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government and anybody that comes along can tell people anything and they will believe it.



“I want to get across several basic concepts:” First, America was not founded on Biblical principles. Why? Because we are a democracy and the Bible is not structured on democracy. It is structured on rules, on canons, on commandments, on government by judges and kings. There were democracies around in Biblical

times, city states in Greece, for example.

Some people claim the Bible is the greatest literature in the world. That is not true! A lot of fine literature is better than the writings in the Bible. If you read the works of contemporary Greek and Roman writers there are marked differences and you can tell how much better many truly are.

Ed described how, in working on *Baubles of Blasphemy*, he searched for current words and concepts that do not appear in the Bible. Here are some examples: cooperation, moral values, rational, rights, tradition, congress, republic, democracy, insight, morality, jury, test, due process, consequences, humanity, humanism, diversity, universe, fairness, homosexual, abortion.

We need go no further than the Treaty with Tripoli, signed in 1797, to show that America was not founded as a Christian nation. This treaty with a Muslim country states explicitly: “The government of the United States is in no sense founded on the Christian religion.” It was approved with the unanimous consent of the Senate and signed by President John Adams.

Edwin then handed out a reprint of several provisions of *The Constitution of the United States*: Article VI; Article XIV; and the First Amendment. The wording in Article VI is very explicit: “...all treaties made, or which shall



be made, under authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land; and the judges in every State shall be bound thereby, any-

thing in the Constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding.”

Article VI continues: “The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several State legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

Before the Constitution was ratified, the representatives of the people insisted there be some amendments that spelled out rights more explicitly. The first words of the first Amendment



state: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.” The original draft said, “make no law establishing religion” but they

wanted the wording more specific. So they changed it to “respecting the establishment” thus making the prohibition more inclusive. The Amendment goes on: “or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the right of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” These rights were so important that they became foundational rights of this country. Many people are confused about the difference between the first phrase (the Establishment Clause) and the second phrase (the Free Exercise Clause).

That unpleasantness known as the Civil War resolved the issue of whether State or Federal law prevailed in favor of the Federal Constitution. The Congress passed the XIVth Amendment. This amendment has several parts but only the first part is relevant to this discussion and what is going on today. It says: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” That was, of course, to make freed slaves citizens of the United States. Since many of the southern states did not like it, the amendment was made stronger by the addition: “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of the citizens of the United



States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Edwin continued on for several more minutes citing several court cases, among them the Dover School board case where Federal Judge Jones outlawed the teaching of Intelligent Design because it is a ruse to establish Religion and therefore unconstitutional. He also emphasized how every time we see a violation of any of these constitutional provisions, we need to protest it in some form or fashion.

-- reported by George Maurer ☚

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, June 20 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/events/4939320/t/cv1_ve

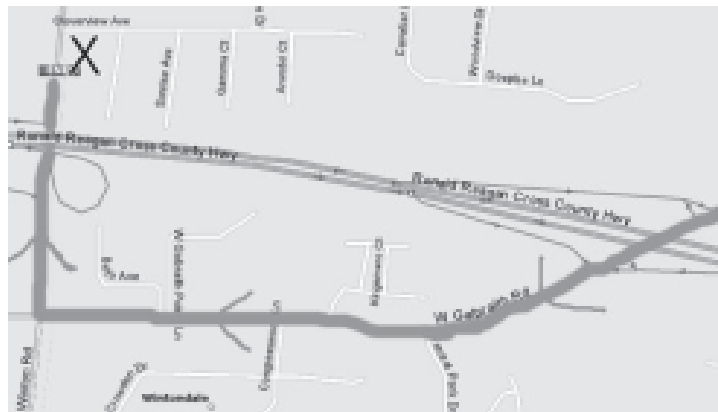
Panera Bread Company
8420 Winton Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45231

From I-75 on West bound Ronald Reagan Highway:
Take the exit at W. Galbraith Road
Turn Left onto W. Galbraith Road
At the next major intersection Turn Right onto
Winton Rd. - heading North.
Cross over Ronald Reagan Highway.
Panera's is on the right at the corner of Winton
Rd. & Cloverview, across the street from
Krogers.

Blunder
(cf Matt 21 + Mark 11)

The ficus is a special kind of tree
Its fruit is sweet, and healthy as can be.
Following nature's rules as to season,
Bears its figs in time, and that's the reason,
That one can pretty much know time of year
The ripened fruit is ready to appear.
So, why did Jesus curse that lovely tree?
He found no figs thereon to have for tea.
How could it have some figs, it wasn't time!
So, when he killed that tree it was a crime!
He cursed it and it just dried up like straw.
Like dad, like son, he's got his father's flaw.
God and his son are mean as they can be.
The devil's nicer, that's the irony.

- Dorothy B. Thompson



Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

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

June 25 - *Silent Sky: the incredible extinction of the passenger pigeon*: Allan Eckert

July 23 - *Ohio Archaeology an illustrated chronicle of Ohio's ancient American Indian cultures*:
Bradley T. Lepper

Aug 27 - *On Intelligence* Jeff Hawkins

Sept 24 - *Economics in Perspective, A Critical History*: John Kenneth Galbraith

Oct 22 - *The "God" Part of the Brain*: Matthew Alper

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

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

- Bryan Sellers





Jesus dispute now in European Human Rights Court

Did he exist? Atheist challenger Luigi Cascioli advances to Strasbourg

Luigi Cascioli, atheist fighter and author of the scholarly book *The Fable of Christ*, has finally brought his case to the European Human Rights Court at Strasbourg. It will be taken up

by famous lawyers Giovanni Di Stefano and Domenico Marinelli, who have acted in several high profile political cases, including that of Saddam Hussein, Tarek Aziz, Telekom Serbia, Milosevich and others.

Luigi Cascioli argues that there is no independent and reliable proof whatsoever for Jesus' historical existence and accuses the Roman Catholic Church of deceiving people with the Fable of Christ for the past 2000 years for financial gain. Cascioli's pointman for the church position is his old schoolmate Father Enrico Righi (76), parish priest in Viterbo, Italy, whom he accused three years ago of committing two criminal offences. By reasserting the church's claim of Jesus' historical existence explicitly in a parish newsletter, Righi "abused public credulity" and "impersonated" some historic figure as Jesus Christ, both punishable according to the Italian Penal Code. Cascioli lost his case in the courts of Catholic Italy, but fulfilled the necessary steps to move it to the European Human Rights Court. So far, the Vatican has declined comment.

– *Rationalist International Bulletin* #154 (15 April 2006)

I'm Hatin' It

Posted on Monday, May 22, 2006. From a September interview with Rashad Akhtar, a twenty-seven-year-old British Muslim, who alleges that the graphic used on the lid of Burger King ice-cream cones resembles the Arabic spelling of "Allah." The interview was conducted by Davina Patel, a reporter for the London newspaper *Eastern Eye*. Burger King apologized and said they would redesign the lid. Originally from *Harper's Magazine*, March 2006.

The Enlightenment happened at half past 12 a.m. in Burger King, Park Royal. I had ordered my food, and a French guy got talking to me and asked, "Are you Muslim?" He said, "Look at this," and he showed me the cone. I saw it and I thought, "Wow," like anyone would. He said, "Turn it around."

I was thinking of my stomach. I was hungry. I would have loved to eat an ice cream. When I saw it, my mouth fell open. I dropped the ice cream. I canceled my order. That was the defining moment of my life.

The Burger King logo is there in Arabic. "Allah" is spelled exactly how it is there, and the Burger King logo is where the *omina* should be. Why, there is no way it could be a coincidence. How can you say it is a spinning swirl? How does it spin on something that is static? You cannot spin it around unless you have a mechanical device. You spin it one direction, to the right, and it is offending a billion people.

I'm not talking about Muslims in the Park Royal vicinity, or in the U.K. I'm talking about globally. Everyone who sees this is going to be offended. If you put a different symbol on there, you're offending Jews, Christians, Sikhs, or Hindus. I am going to try my best in life, so that these people do not operate in a single Muslim country again, so that we get an apology to every single Muslim on this planet in their language, in their country, on a national TV station: "Sorry. We, as an American company, are sorry. We didn't mean to offend you."

What angers me most is that most people, once they have finished with it, they look at it and say, "Nice cone. Nice design. Nice cone design." They chuck it away. That is disrespectful. Don't throw it away. Keep it as evidence. A reminder of what these people are doing every single day of our lives.

We showed this to Muslim customers in Burger King and they were disgusted. We went to the manager. "Is this true?" we asked. He said, "Yes, my brother. It is true." I spoke to two other Pakistani Muslim guys there and they said, "We are sickened." They were cussing Burger King.

I feel humiliated. I want to humiliate the person who did this to an extent that he never works again. I'm going to make him see that it was the biggest mistake in his life. I want to meet the guy. I want to ask the guy, "What does this mean to you?" then never see his face again.

In a way, I'm glad he did this to me. It has opened my eyes. The fear of God, the love of God, the love of not letting anyone disrespect God. Even though it means nothing to some people and may mean nothing to some Muslims in this country, this is my jihad. I'm not going to rest until I find the person who is responsible. I'm going to bring this country down.

Quote
• When I was a kid, I used to pray every night for a •
• new bike. Then I realized, the Lord doesn't work that •
• way. So I just stole one and asked Him to forgive me ... •
• and I got it! •
•
• **Unquote!** •

– Emo Phillips



Management Changes in the World Humanist Umbrella Organization

Suresh Lalvani, Company Secretary and Director of Operations of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), reports some management changes.

Controversial former President Roy Brown has retired from the Executive Committee. New President is Sonja Eggerickx, a senior school inspector from Belgium and



Sonja Eggerickx

longtime EC member. Larry Jones has been elected First Vice President; Roar Johnsen, Jack Jeffery and Rob Buitenweg are Vice Presidents. Treasurer is Roger Lepeix. Of the two employed officers, Suresh Lalvani will continue as the Company Secretary and Director of Operations, while Babu

Gogineni, formerly stationed as Executive Director in the London office, has returned to his native state Andhra Pradesh in South India. From there he will undertake important developmental work for the IHEU focusing South Asia and Africa.

– *Rationalist International Bulletin*, # 155
(28 May 2006)

Not married, with children?

Not in our town thanks

Missouri council defends policy to “protect values”
Unmarried couple could be fined \$500 a day

Oliver Burkeman in New York
The Guardian, 25 May 2006

The town of Black Jack, Missouri, got its name from the variety of oak tree that once grew nearby. “Those stately trees represent who and what we are today, a proud city with strong roots, providing the safety and respite of community,” its promotional literature explains. It is the kind of place where family is valued - just as long as the family in question meets certain criteria. Olivia Shelltrack and Fondray Loving’s family, it seems, do not.

The couple could face fines of \$500 a day, and Black Jack is already facing the unwelcome glare of national attention, as a result of a local regulation that bans unmarried couples with more than one child from occupying homes there.

“The character and stability of a city is not an accident, it is the result of years of hard work by the residents,” Norman McCourt, the mayor of Black Jack, said in a statement after the city council rejected a proposal to abolish the regulation. Mr Loving and Ms Shelltrack now plan to file a lawsuit with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, while the US department of housing, in Washington, has launched an investigation to determine whether Black Jack’s ban is illegal.

Mr Loving, 33, and Ms Shelltrack, 31, have lived together for 13 years. They have two children and also live with Ms Shelltrack’s daughter, who calls Mr Loving her father. They bought their Black Jack home earlier this year. “We’re just like anybody else,” Ms Shelltrack told the *Guardian*. “It’s not like we’re purple with polka dots or something. I just really feel like this shouldn’t be anybody’s business.” The couple were not opposed to getting married, she said, but wanted to wait until they could afford a “nice big wedding ... I don’t think a piece of paper is going to validate our relationship, though. We love each other, and our kids are happy, healthy individuals. You can’t define family.”

Other American towns have regulations similar to Black Jack’s, which technically bars any group of more than three people from living together unless related by “blood, marriage or adoption”. Generally, such rules are intended to stop rowdy college fraternity houses from being established on residential streets. But in a country increasingly riven on issues of social morality, housing regulations represent an easy way for towns to try to give their definitions of acceptable lifestyles the force of law.

In an earlier dispute, in 1999, Mr McCourt wrote that city officials “do not believe that an unmarried couple having children, residing in our community, is an appropriate standard that they wish to approve”. The family in that case broke the restriction because they had triplets.

Black Jack has backtracked on the mayor’s earlier warning that Mr Loving and Ms Shelltrack might be evicted, but if it takes them to municipal court and wins it could fine them up to \$500 a day. Sheldon Stock, the town’s special counsel, said a 1977 supreme court judgment had affirmed the view that a city could uphold traditional family values by limiting the number of unrelated people who share a home.

“I find it curious at best that housing laws are being used to define the relationships that count,” said Frank Alexander of Emory University law school in Georgia, who has researched the phenomenon. “It seems a dangerous way to do indirectly what we may not be willing to confront directly.”



which is social control over the definition of family.” Rules were being used increasingly, he said, to target immigrant communities - “where extended familial relationships are common”.

Michael Watson, a former marine who lives in Black Jack, has been taking a special interest in the case, since he too shares a home with his girlfriend and their children. He told the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* they had contemplated getting married, but were unwilling. “If I do get married, am I getting married out of super love, or am I getting married because Black Jack says I have to? If we’re forced out of our house, what do our neighbours get? A sex offender? A drug addict? A drug dealer?”



How U.S. Forces found the most dangerous man in Iraq.

This should have been the big story in the news: To get the number-one enemy of freedom, we first had to find the crazy terrorist he was giving spiritual advice to. Crazy terrorists in Iraq are a dime-a-dozen these days, but there is only one, Abu

Musab al-Zarqawi who gets his spiritual advice from Sheikh Abdel Rahman. The plan was boldly simple: find al-Zarqawi and track him until he leads us to Rahman. Then, call in an F-16 strike. The problem in Iraq isn’t terrorists, it’s the clerics, who are constantly inflating the number of virgins per martyr.

Why certain religious convictions gain few followers.

According to a Reuters story out of Kiev, on Sunday evening when the zoo was crowded with visitors, a man lowered himself by rope into the lion enclosure and walked up to the lions shouting, “God will save me if he exists,” thus proving himself to be a man of faith. Without hesitation, a lioness severed his carotid artery.

– *What’s New*, Robert L. Park, 9 June 2006

Military Chaplains to Pray any way they want to!

Yesterday, the House passed a \$513 B defense authorization bill. This bill includes language allowing military chaplains to pray “according to the dictates of the chaplain’s own conscience.” Current rules call for nonsectarian prayers, or a moment of silence, at mandatory public gatherings. Focus on the Family, The Christian Coalition, and other evangelical Christian groups had urged the President to issue an executive order guaranteeing the right of chaplains to pray in the name of Jesus. When Bush failed to act, Republicans on the Armed Services Committee added the provision to the defense authorization bill. An amendment offered in committee by Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY), calling on chaplains to show “sensitivity, respect and tolerance for all faiths,” was defeated on a party-line vote. Rules did not allow floor debate.

– *What’s New*, Robert L. Park, 12 May 2006

Quote
There are all kinds of freedom in America – free speech, the right to bear arms – but when the years have piled up so high on their back that they can’t stand up straight anymore, many American find out they also have the freedom to starve. – Walter Mosley, *Cinnamon Kiss* p. 141
.....**Unquote**

Human papillomavirus vaccine approved.

Seldom in this troubled world do we get to report a story so full of promise for humankind. The FDA yesterday announced approval of a vaccine against the virus that causes cervical cancer, the result of a 15-year effort that began at the National Cancer Institute. Human papillomavirus is the most common sexually transmitted disease, and the second-leading cause of death among women, killing some 233,000 women each year. Death rates are highest in countries where the Pap smear is not widely used. The vaccine should be given before girls become sexually active, however, some conservative Christian groups object, pointing out that the vaccine is no more effective than abstinence. No doubt this is true.

Thank God for the First Amendment to the Constitution.

A federal judge in Iowa ruled last Friday that a state-financed evangelical Christian program to help inmates re-enter society was “pervasively sectarian” and violated separation of church and state. Prison Fellowship Ministries, founded by Chuck Colson, was using taxpayer dollars to proselytize inmates. Colson, of Watergate fame, has done a little hard time himself. This sets the stage for a test of a Justice Department plan to set aside cell blocks at federal prisons for a private group to “counsel” prisoners in a single faith to prepare them for release. Justice insists the program is constitutional because it’s voluntary and participants will receive no special favors. But the issue is whether they think they will receive special treatment. Recent appointments to the Supreme Court take on a new significance.



God's Own Party

by Kevin Phillips

Seattle Times (14 May 2006)

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Now that the GOP has been transformed by the rise of the South, the trauma of terrorism and George W. Bush's conviction that God wanted him to be president, a deeper conclusion can be drawn: The Republican Party has become the first religious party in U.S. history.

We have had small-scale theocracies in North America before — in Puritan New England and later in Mormon Utah. Today, a leading power such as the United States approaches theocracy when it meets the conditions currently on display: an elected leader who believes himself to speak for the Almighty, a ruling political party that represents religious true believers, the certainty of many Republican voters that government should be guided by religion and, on top of it all, a White House that adopts agendas seemingly animated by biblical worldviews.

Indeed, there is a potent change taking place in this country's domestic and foreign policy, driven by religion's new political prowess and its role in projecting military power in the Mideast.

The United States has organized much of its military posture since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks around the protection of oil fields, pipelines and sea lanes. But U.S. preoccupation with the Middle East has another dimension. In addition to its concerns with oil and terrorism, the White House is courting end-times theologians and electorates for whom the Holy Lands are a battleground of Christian destiny. Both pursuits — oil and biblical expectations — require a dissimulation in Washington that undercuts the U.S. tradition of commitment to the role of an informed electorate.

The political corollary — fascinating but appalling — is the recent transformation of the Republican presidential coalition. Since the election of 2000 and especially that of 2004, three pillars have become central: the oil/national-security complex, with its pervasive interests; the religious right, with its doctrinal imperatives and massive electorate; and the debt-driven financial sector, which extends far beyond the old symbolism of Wall Street.

President Bush has promoted these alignments, interest groups and their underpinning values. His family, over multiple generations, has been linked to a politics that conjoined finance, national security and oil. In recent decades, the Bushes have added close ties to evangelical and fundamentalist power brokers of many persuasions.

Over a quarter-century of Bush presidencies and vice presidencies, the Republi-

can Party has slowly become the vehicle of all three interests — a fusion of petroleum-defined national security; a crusading, simplistic Christianity; and a reckless, credit-feeding financial complex. The three are increasingly allied in commitment to Republican politics.

On the most important front, I am beginning to think that the Southern-dominated, biblically driven Washington GOP represents a rogue coalition, like the Southern, proslavery politics that controlled Washington until Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860.

I have a personal concern over what has become of the Republican coalition. Forty years ago, I began a book, "The Emerging Republican Majority," which I finished in 1967 and took to the 1968 Republican presidential campaign, for which I became the chief political and voting-patterns analyst. Published in 1969, while I was still in the fledgling Nixon administration, the volume was identified by *Newsweek* as the "political bible of the Nixon Era."

In that book I coined the term "Sun Belt" to describe the oil, military, aerospace and retirement country stretching from Florida to California, but debate concentrated on the argument — since fulfilled and then some — that the South was on its way into the national Republican Party. Four decades later, this framework has produced the alliance of oil, fundamentalism and debt.

Some of that evolution was always implicit. If any region of the United States

had the potential to produce a high-powered, crusading fundamentalism, it was Dixie. If any new alignment had the potential to nurture a fusion of oil interests and the military-industrial complex, it was the Sun Belt, which helped draw them into commercial and political proximity and collaboration.

Wall Street, of course, has long been part of the GOP coalition. But members of the Downtown Association and the Links Club were never enthusiastic about "Joe Sixpack" and middle America, to say nothing of preachers such as Oral Roberts or the Tupelo, Miss., Assemblies of God. The new cohabitation is an unnatural one.

While studying economic geography and history in Britain, I had been intrigued by the Eurasian "heartland" theory of Sir Halford Mackinder, a prominent geographer of the early 20th century. Control of that heartland, Mackinder argued, would determine control of the world. In North America, I thought, the coming together of a heartland — across fading Civil War lines — would determine control of Washington.

This was the prelude to today's "red states." The American heartland, from Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico to Ohio and the Appalachian coal states, has become (along with the onetime Confederacy) an electoral hydrocarbon coalition. It cherishes sport-utility vehicles and easy carbon-dioxide emissions policy, and applauds preemptive U.S. air strikes on uncooperative, terrorist-coddling Persian Gulf countries fortuitously blessed with



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huge reserves of oil.

Because the United States is beginning to run out of its own oil sources, a military solution to an energy crisis is hardly lunacy. Neither Caesar nor Napoleon would have flinched. What Caesar and Napoleon did not face, but less able American presidents do, is that bungled overseas military embroilments could also boomerang economically.

The United States, some \$4 trillion in hock internationally, has become the world's leading debtor, increasingly nagged by worry that some nations will sell dollars in their reserves and switch their holdings to rival currencies. Washington prints bonds and dollar-green IOUs, which European and Asian bankers accumulate until for some reason they lose patience. This is the debt Achilles' heel, which stands alongside the oil Achilles' heel.

Unfortunately, more danger lurks in the responsiveness of the new GOP coalition to Christian evangelicals, fundamentalists and Pentecostals, who muster some 40 percent of the party electorate. Many millions believe that the Armageddon described in the Bible is coming soon. Chaos in the explosive Middle East, far from being a threat, actually heralds the second coming of Jesus Christ. Oil-price spikes, murderous hurricanes, deadly tsunamis and melting polar ice caps lend further credence.

The potential interaction between the end-times electorate, inept pursuit of Persian Gulf oil, Washington's multiple deceptions and the financial crisis that could follow a substantial liquidation by foreign holders of U.S. bonds is the stuff of nightmares. To watch U.S. voters enable such policies — the GOP coalition is unlikely to turn back — is depressing to someone who spent many years researching, watching and cheering those grass roots.

Four decades ago, the new GOP coalition seemed certain to enjoy a major infusion of conservative Northern Catholics and Southern Protestants. This troubled me not at all. I agreed with the predominant Republican argument at the time that "secular" liberals, by badly misjudging the depth and importance of religion in the United States, had given conservatives a powerful and legitimate electoral opportunity.

Since then, my appreciation of the intensity of religion in the United States has deepened. When religion was trod upon in the 1960s and thereafter by secular advocates determined to push Christianity out of the public square, the move unleashed an evangelical, fundamentalist and Pentecostal counterreformation, with strong theocratic pressures becoming visible in the Republican national coalition and its leadership.

Besides providing critical support for invading Iraq — widely anathematized by preachers as a second Babylon — the Republican coalition has also seeded half a dozen controversies in the realm of science. These include Bible-based disbelief in Darwinian theories of evolution, dismissal of global warming, disagreement with geological explanations of fossil-fuel depletion, religious rejection of global population planning, derogation of women's rights and opposition to stem-cell research.

This suggests that U.S. society and politics may again be heading for a defining controversy such as the Scopes trial of 1925. That embarrassment chastened fundamentalism for a generation, but the outcome of the eventual 21st century test is hardly assured.

These developments have warped the Republican Party and its electoral coalition, muted Democratic voices and become a gathering threat to America's future. No leading world power in modern memory has become a captive of the sort of biblical inerrancy that dismisses modern knowledge and science. The last parallel was in the early 17th century, when the papacy, with the agreement of inquisitional Spain, disciplined the astronomer Galileo for saying that the sun, not the Earth, was the center of our solar system.

Conservative true believers will scoff at such concerns. The United States is a unique and chosen nation, they say; what did or did not happen to Rome, imperial Spain, the Dutch Republic and Britain is irrelevant. The catch here, alas, is that these nations also thought they were unique and that God was on their side. The revelation that he apparently was not added a further debilitating note to the late stages of each national decline.

Over the past 25 years, I have warned frequently of these political, economic and

historical (but not religious) precedents. The concentration of wealth that developed in the United States in the bull market of 1982 to 2000 was also typical of the zeniths of previous world economic powers as their elites pursued surfeit in Mediterranean villas or in the country-house splendor of Edwardian England. In a nation's early years, debt is a vital and creative collaborator in economic expansion; in late stages, it becomes what Mr. Hyde was to Dr. Jekyll: an increasingly dominant mood and facial distortion. The United States of the early 21st century is well into this debt-driven climax, with some analysts arguing — all too plausibly — that an unsustainable credit bubble has replaced the stock bubble that burst in 2000.

Unfortunately, three of the preeminent weaknesses displayed in these past declines have been religious excess, a declining energy and industrial base, and debt often linked to foreign and military overstretch. Politics in the United States — and especially the evolution of the governing Republican coalition — deserves much of the blame for the fatal convergence of these forces in America today.

Kevin Phillips is the author of "American Theocracy: The Perils and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century" (Viking). ☚

Quote

San Francisco Earthquake:

If, as they say, God spanked this town, For being much too frisky, Why did He burn His churches down, And saved Hotaling's Whiskey?

According to Franklin Graham, god's wrath was used to wipe out sin in New Orleans. But again, god missed the sinning part of the river city and hit the residential areas instead. God wiped out hospitals, churches, and schools, but left the French Quarter with its bars, gambling, and prostitution intact. The all-knowing, all-powerful god certainly has poor aim.

— John A. Henderson

Unquote



Thoughts for Atheists at Graduation.

The attached was written for presentation at what is believed to be the first Atheist, Humanist, Freethinker Baccalaureate ceremony in the country, to be held tomorrow, I believe in Pennsylvania.

Good evening sinners.

At High School graduations throughout our country, it is customary for older people to tell younger people what the older people were told by older people, who are now probably dead people, at their own High School baccalaureates and graduations. This is usually some sad, emotional, and boring commentary on how the world and the future is yours, how you are the future, that we are leaving it to you, and that the speaker's generation messed up the world, but the future is still full of limitless possibilities, and that it is up to you to straighten it all out for the generations to come, and that with hard work, faith, and god's help it can all be done. There, I have just summarized every known High School graduation speech. When you are old you can tell the same rubbish to a new generation of bright eyed graduates ready to go forth into the world to breed, grow old, and die.

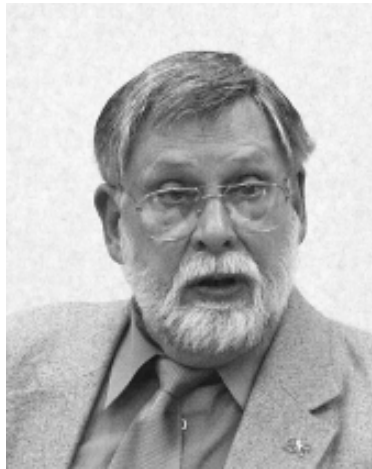
The problem with all of these far too long and whining baccalaureate and graduation speeches, or sermons, is that they usually call for more of what has caused the problems complained of. The baccalaureate talks are the worst. That is where educated adults, who should know better, pray to invisible imaginary friends for wished-for things that never happen.

What is wonderful and different tonight is that this is an Atheist Baccalaureate. And it may be the first such in the history of the United States. So you will go down in history. Some will say you will go to Hell. As Atheists, you know that the world is not run by magic and magical thinking. Atheists do not bring up their children in a land of make believe. We have tried to teach you the principles of reason, critical thinking, logical fallacy, ethical behavior, and the methods of science and evidence. We want you to know that there is a big difference between Righteousness and Self-Righteousness.

We want you to know and understand the difference between belief and proof; between faith and fact. We want you to know that you are part of a great historic tradition of bringing light unto darkness; that there is a difference between that which is ethical and that which is expedient; a difference between being truly moral and being a follower of religious rules. We want you to know that science is based on facts, not on fairy tales. That evolution is a fact and that "Creationism"

is a fairy tale. That there is a difference between coincidence and causation. A difference between potential and actual. That an egg is not a chicken and that an acorn is not an oak tree.

At this rite of passage, we want you, our children who are our future, to understand that what happens to each of us and to our world is based on cause and effect—not on faith and miracles. We want you to know that behavior has consequences. If you run on a wet trail you can slip and be hurt. If you let fools be your rulers, you will be ruled by fools.



Edwin Kagin, Esq.

We want you to live—not for life after death, but for life before death. We all share the mystery of having been born human. As humans, we are many races, many nations, and many religions. We can learn to live together or we can destroy ourselves. No god is going to save us. We must save ourselves.

For your own safety's sake, we have tried to help you learn to distinguish between logic and fallacy; between science and superstition; between real and pretend; between the wonder of discovery and magical thinking. We want you to know the difference between doing and dogma; between imagination and mythology. And we want you to understand that learning never ends. We want you to know, as many do not, that life does not stop with High School graduation. None of us know the limits of what you may yet learn and what you may yet become. There will also be some pain and some disappointments. It is all part of the deal. We did not make the rules.

Most importantly, we want to help you, our children who are now young adults, to be competent. You will be competent when you can survive, thrive, create, empathize, and interact justly with others, free of pain, fear, and guilt—without gods, without religion, and without us. If you can achieve, as we know you can, self-reliant adulthood, you will not need the gods or the religion, and you will not miss them. If we have done it right, you will not need us either. But perhaps you will miss us.

There is one thing we want. We want you, and your children, and your children's children, to be able to live in a world where it is okay not to believe in god. To do otherwise is to defile the graves of our martyrs.

May your future be better than your past, and may that measure of peace, justice, harmony and understanding denied religion and its deities be attained by you as mortals through the use of your minds, and may reason, science, curiosity, and discovery replace the fear, the guilt, the pain, and the ignorance of trembling in terror before capricious gods.

—by Edwin Kagin, 2006



BOOK REVIEW

Just a Theory: Exploring the Nature of Science
by Moti Ben-Ari
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005)

The author of this book “used to look down upon geology; after all what could possibly be interesting about chipping off rock samples with a hammer.” (p. 189) You may imagine his contempt for the social sciences, they may just as well not exist at all. “Science” in the title refers strictly to the natural sciences, but includes mathematics, the author’s own discipline. For what it tries to explain, – what science is, why scientists do it and how they work, – it is an excellent introduction. And, it is a popular introduction, not a major philosophical tome.

The author explicitly distinguishes science from pseudoscience and postmodernism. He further discusses religious claims to knowledge. The title itself is a parody on the creationist claim that evolution is “just a theory.” Thus Ben-Ari spends time on “words scientists don’t use” including why a theory in science is not the “mere guess” it is in popular parlance.

The author examines the question of falsification. A scientific idea must be subject to “falsification,” that is evidence must be conceivable, that would refute it. If an idea is beyond refutation, as so many religious ideas are, they are not scientific. Indeed one mark of pseudoscience is that its ideas refuse to be falsified. Even though homeopathic remedies are diluted so not a molecule of the curative substance remains, nothing persuades the homeopathic doctor that his nostrum simply can not have any effect. Similarly, though “subluxations” can not be found by any objective observer, chiropractors know they are there. On the other hand, just because something can be falsified does not make it scientific.

The question what distinguishes science from non-science is not simple. Scientific knowledge deals with reality. We have knowledge, and know reality only when the community of scientists comes to a consensus. And even then they may all be mistaken. Ben-Ari’s discussion is complex and difficult. Yet, we know that the postmodernist critique of science, the claim “science is just another belief” is no more

true than religion or primitive folk medicine is wrong. Too much of technology testifies to the reality of scientific knowledge.

The role of logic and mathematics in science is close to the interest of the author. He says all good science can be reduced to a simple formula. Indeed, he asserts a good scientific theory can be imprinted on a t-shirt. Newton’s $F=Gm_1m_2/r^2$; or Einstein’s $E=mc^2$. But would that make Darwin’s evolution poor science. The author back pedals and shows us that he can indeed make Darwin’s concepts simple enough to put on a t-shirt. He also introduces us to the use of mathematics in evolution by reviewing the Hardy-Weinberg equation for genetic equilibrium in a population.

Is mathematics a science? Is it something to be discovered in reality, or merely a game or language invented by mathematicians. Is it perhaps the language of God, by which he built the universe? Ben-Ari informs us he subscribes to the reality interpretation of mathematics. Which is perhaps most convincingly demonstrated by his discussion of the role of statistical inference in research.

Let me conclude this is a most excellent discussion of the many aspects of science. I wish everyone would have read it – it might decrease some of the nonsense talked, written, and thought about scientific subjects. Most of all I wish every high school and college student would take the time to read *Just a Theory*. It is too much to ask the author to have included consideration of the social sciences, but someone at some time should write this kind of book about them.

– Wolf Roder

Quote

No apparition of the Virgin Mary on a tortilla needed:
In Wacko Texas a group of sixty protestant ministers protested plans to open a Hooters restaurant. It was built anyway, and on opening day Monsignor Isidore Rozycki, the senior Roman Catholic priest in town, was there to say a blessing. “Blessings are part of the Catholic tradition,” Rozycki explained, also noting he had eaten at various Hooters outlets. He noted restaurants in the chain are “a place of laughter” with “great food.” Father Rozycki was invited: a police detective suggested it to the restaurant managers, and they liked the idea. Rozycki felt it was important to bless the “families that enter” as well as the employees who work there to support their families, but many area Catholics are outraged that the 63-year-old priest would even dare enter the restaurant. (*Waco Tribune*)

Unquote



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FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.