

Author: Religious fights not all about God

Lines between church, government too often blurred, freethinker says

BY RON CAMMEL
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

GRAND RAPIDS — Secularism is not new, says Susan Jacoby, a former Washington Post reporter and author of seven books.

Contrary to claims of today's "right-wingers," American political discourse has always included appeals to reason outside of religious belief, she said. It was no accident that God is left out of the U.S. Constitution, she said.

Jacoby, author of "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism," recently spoke to about 200 people — the Freethought Association of West Michigan's largest crowd ever.

The association was renamed as a chapter in the international Center for Inquiry, a nonprofit group encouraging evidence-based inquiry into science, religion and other fields.

Chapter President Jeff Seaver said Grand Rapids is the smallest metropolitan area with a chapter.

Jacoby said Americans have turned away from enlightened reasoning like never before. She bemoaned Democratic candidates "rivaling" Republicans in stating the im-

portance of their faiths.

Even early religious fundamentalists understood the church should not interfere with government, or else government would interfere in religion, Jacoby said.

Political discourse should be based on shared values, not on "supernatural fantasies," she said. "Separation of church and state is the scaffolding where values are debated."

All societies have outlawed murder, varying definitions of the term, and used other principles of the Ten Commandments before the Bible was written, she said. Values behind laws come from many sources, she said.

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Susan Jacoby

out for those who cannot care for themselves, "not because that's what the Bible says but because that's what it means to be human — our com-

mon experience of being human," Jacoby said.

Atheists and moderate or liberal religious people can get along fine, she said.

Moreover, many religious obtrusions in public life, such as the Ten Commandments in courthouses, are about power struggles, not religion, she said.

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Bob Goodrich

From: board-bounces@cfimichigan.org on behalf of Jeff Seaver [jeff@cfimichigan.org]
Sent: Monday, October 08, 2007 9:09 AM
To: board@cfimichigan.org
Cc: Barry Karr; DJ Grothe
Subject: [CFI MI Board] Grand Rapids Press coverage of Jacoby event
Attachments: ATT4379186.txt

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Saturday, September 29, 2007

By Ron Cammel

The Grand Rapids Press

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10/8/2007