



The Cowtown Humanist

Volume Nine Number 3 - April 2007

WE WILL MEET AT THE WESTSIDE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH
LOCATED AT 901 PAGE AVE, FT WORTH AT 7 PM ON APRIL 11TH

Many of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria, 2001 8th Avenue prior to our meetings (it's just south of Elizabeth Ave)

All are invited to join us at 5:30

At our next meeting (Wednesday April 11th) Dr. Jean Tant, a leading psychologist in Fort Worth, and civil libertarian of great note, will talk about this great organization and its contributions to our country and to the world. Dr. Tant's outstanding volunteer work has earned her the exemplary award of National Lifetime Civil Libertarian for the Year 2005. Come hear what this wonderful lady has to add to our knowledge and understanding of one of the most valuable assets to a free and democratic society.

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. - A group of renowned Humanists, atheists and agnostics will gather at Harvard in April, to take on an unlikely opponent: atheist "fundamentalists."

The Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard has long been among the most distinct institutions serving the non-religious community, and this April 20-22 it marks its 30th anniversary with an international conference asserting humanism is a non-theistic philosophy that allows for understanding and respect between believers in God and atheists.

"Vocal atheist authors such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris have recently publicized the notion that atheists must defeat religion and that science is all we need to understand the world. The press dubbed this phenomenon 'the new atheism,'" said Humanist Chaplain of Harvard University Greg M. Epstein.

But Epstein said "Humanism", which encompasses, but does not end at atheism, is the philosophy that best represents the diverse, emerging population of 1.1 billion non-religious people around the world.

"Humanism takes science seriously, but is more than just science!" Epstein said. "Humanists love life here on Earth, find inspiration in human creativity, and respect all human beings."

"The time has come to say to the world that inclusiveness is the best approach, for non-religious and religious people alike," Epstein said.

The Humanist Chaplaincy has quietly committed itself to interfaith dialogue at Harvard for three decades, said Epstein, who has headed the Chaplaincy since 2005.

The April 20-22 conference at Harvard will include some of the greatest thinkers of our time, including novelist Salman Rushdie, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, two-time Pulitzer Prize winning scientist E.O. Wilson, and renowned psychology professor and author Steven Pinker. Humanist Congressional lobbyist Lori Lipman Brown, of the Secular Coalition for America, will speak about how humanists can become more active in politics. Singer-songwriter Dar Williams will perform a private concert.

The conference will emphasize humanism's positive values, connections among humanists from many cultural traditions, and how humanist thought can contribute to global peace.

"Humanists and theists must promote cooperation between science and religion, the two most powerful forces in the world, to protect the Earth and its environment, however we believe they came into existence," said E.O. Wilson, who is slated to speak at the conference on April 22.

This January, New York-based think-tank the Institute for Humanist Studies awarded the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard a grant to provide a full-credit course on modern, organized Humanism. At the conference, Epstein, along with retired founding chaplain Tom Ferrick, a former Catholic priest, will unveil plans to create this program and establish Humanist chaplaincies at other universities.

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According to *Christianity Today*, Congressman Pete Stark (D-California) became the first member of Congress to deny the existence of God. "When the Secular Coalition asked me to complete a survey on my religious beliefs, I indicated I am a Unitarian who does not believe in a supreme being."

"It is sad but not surprising that the current Congress has produced this historic first – one of its members has denied God," said Christian Seniors Association Executive Director James Lafferty. "The liberals in Congress want to throttle any school child who bows his or her head in prayer, but they want to establish a right for liberals to bash Christians and berate God around the clock."

Continued on page 4 (see Christianity today)

Dr. Laura Schlessinger is a radio personality who dispenses advice to people who call in to her radio show. She said as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22 and cannot be condoned under any circumstance. The following is an open letter to Dr. Laura penned by a East Coast resident, which was posted on the Internet.

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to follow them:

When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Lev.15:19- 24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination - Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? - Lev.24:10

Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

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USA: How a state funded healthcare program turned into a global crusade

The powerful Christian Right in the USA has taken control of the government's flagship program to combat AIDS worldwide. Under their influence, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that commands a five-year budget of \$15 billion, is being misused for a crusade for conservative Christian values instead of for fighting the disease.

The PEPFAR was launched in January 2003. Initially, the reputed world help organisation CARE was the government's contract partner for the fight against AIDS in Africa and Asia. CARE was to distribute 50 million over two years in competitive grants to suitable subcontractors and to oversee their work. But the CARE-contract was a thorn in the flesh of the Christian Right. In their eyes, CARE committed two cardinal sins: Though they tried to cooperate with President Bush's "faith-based initiative" and distributed a major part of the grants to religious organisations, they insisted that all grantees - secular or religious - should technically qualify for the entrusted work. The Christian Right would have preferred to see that the grant money was exclusively and unconditionally distributed within their ideological and political circles. CARE's second sin was to promote the use of condoms to prevent AIDS infection. This was in accordance with the earlier policy of the US government, but against the agenda of the Christian crusaders for sexual abstinence as the only way of AIDS prevention. Under their pressure, the official government policy shifted with the launching of the PEPFAR in 2003 from recommending condom use to promoting "abstinence, faithfulness, and, when appropriate, condoms". But this was still not enough of a concession. Meantime, condoms are - unofficially - banned and everybody considering them useful is eliminated from the program.

This year, the propagandists of Christian morality launched a furious campaign against CARE, accusing the organisation of being "anti-American" and "promoting prostitution and drug use". The US government obliged. After all, the smear campaign was led by President Bush's strongest supporters. Among them is James Dobson, one of the commanders of the Christian Right and head of the organisation Focus on the Family that sent out 5 million letters and e-mails to support Bush's reelection in 2004.

The CARE contract was discontinued and replaced by a \$200 million program that aims at Christian groups subscribing to the abstinence-line. The new program is overseen by the government agency USAID. Under the guidance of the White House' "Faith-based office", USAID had been cleansed from "secular elements"

A NEW FORM OF HUMANISM

by Claude Piron

Claude Piron is a Swiss psychologist who taught in the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Geneva from 1973 to 1994. He has worked as a translator at the United Nations in Geneva and New York, and is best known in the Esperanto world as the author of a popular series of detective novels.

A Humanistic Commitment

Nothing, it seems to me, is capable of defining humanism more appropriately than the famous line from the Latin poet Terence: *Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*. "I am a man: nothing human is alien to me." At the base of this concept is a sense of solidarity uniting the humanist with all persons, regardless of their race, religion, or culture. To be a humanist is, fundamentally, to love human beings; and to love them, in the deepest sense, is to want them to develop according to their own nature, to have the desire to relate to them and know them, to care for them, and to respect them in their entirety.

All of these elements are to be found at the root of the Esperanto phenomenon. It may appear strange for someone to dedicate a number of hours to the assimilation of a language almost completely useless in commerce and industry, a language that the diplomatic world ignores, that scientists can apparently do without, and that is not tied to a centuries-old culture. But the person who is skeptical about such a linguistic pursuit is not aware of how richly rewarding it may be emotionally, nor of how satisfying the feeling can be of participating in a wide-ranging activity intended to promote the psychological maturation of human society.

In order to become fully mature, one must abandon both infantile self-centeredness and abstract adolescent idealism. And people, in their relations with the wide world, face the temptation of clinging to these two immature attitudes. The first, the infantile, encompasses a tendency to lock oneself blindly within one's material interests. Once having fallen into this trap, an individual often becomes cynical, unaware of the fact that what he is hiding under his so-called "realism" is actually only a self-centered withdrawal into a protective cocoon that provides shelter from wider responsibilities. The other temptation, typical of adolescence, is to allow oneself to be governed by an abstract idealism.

The head is filled with ideas of self-dedication, and the heart beats fervently for the Third World and all humankind; an emotion vibrates every time one thinks about the victims of one dictator or another, or one or another unjust regime. But concretely, practically one does nothing, and continues to live one's small life, though not without a dull sense of guilt. Esperantism, the use and advocacy of Esperanto, proposes a commitment that guards against this doubles tumbling-block, and its effects are far more profound than might be apparent at first glance.

It prevents stumbling into cynical self-centeredness, because it does not satisfy a purely material or immediate self-interest, and invites you to come out of the protective shell mentioned above. And it prevents stumbling into nebulous idealism, because it is

based on a concrete reality, embodied in a veritable means of communication which when appropriately mastered enables you to engage in dialogue with a community of people from all countries and social environments. Names such as Poland, Japan, Brazil, and Iran evoke in the ordinary citizen pictures from a newspaper or television program, or perhaps memories of a vacation. In the Esperanto speaker they evoke a face, an address, a face-to-face exchange or one by letter, tape or e-mail. It is always a matter of people meeting people, of their getting in touch with each other and being capable of directly expressing their ideas about life, or of sharing their joys and torments. Contrary to a widespread opinion, English does not enable a similar type of dialogue, for two reasons.

For one, in the majority of countries it can be used only by a socioeconomic and scientific-intellectual elite. For another, even if a non-native English speaker seems to have mastered it almost perfectly, he never senses it as a true personal possession, but always as something foreign that demands more cerebral energy than use of the native tongue. For structural and other reasons, Esperanto once learned is never experienced as foreign.

Reposted from the NYTimes:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/20/science/20moral.html?ref=science>

Some animals are surprisingly sensitive to the plight of others. Chimpanzees, who cannot swim, have drowned in zoo moats trying to save others. Given the chance to get food by pulling a chain that would also deliver an electric shock to a companion, rhesus monkeys will starve themselves for several days.

Biologists argue that these and other social behaviors are the precursors of human morality. They further believe that if morality grew out of behavioral rules shaped by evolution, it is for biologists, not philosophers or theologians, to say what these rules are.

Moral philosophers do not take very seriously the biologists' bid to annex their subject, but they find much of interest in what the biologists say and have started an academic conversation with them.

The original call to battle was sounded by the biologist Edward O. Wilson more than 30 years ago, when he suggested in his 1975 book "Sociobiology" that "the time has come for ethics to be removed temporarily from the hands of the philosophers and biologized" He may have jumped the gun about the time having come, but in the intervening decades biologists have made considerable progress.



Abdel Karim Suleiman, a 23-year-old former law student, has been sentenced to 4 years imprisonment by a court in Alexandria for insulting both Islam and the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in articles that he published in his Internet blog. The trial took merely five minutes. The judge sentenced him to three years for insulting Islam and to one year for insulting the president, whom he called a dictator. Suleiman is the first person in Egypt, who has been convicted for nothing else but peacefully expressing his opinion on the Internet. His lawyers announced that he would appeal against the judgment.

Ed note: Egypt receives more U.S. foreign aid than any other country except Israel.

Christianity Today (Continued from page 1)

“It is time for religious members of Congress to push back. A simple declaration of a belief in God by members of Congress on the House floor will be greatly informative for the American people. Members who wish to expand could use the ‘special orders’ portion of the House calendar to elaborate but a simple “I believe in God” will suffice.

“We have long recognized that all of this hot air about ‘separation of church and state’ has been a veiled effort to intimidate and silence religious voices in public policy matters.

“If the liberal House leadership refuses to recognize lawmakers who want to affirm their belief in God, then we suggest they add it to the end of floor speeches on other matters.

“Congressman Stark’s statement is a very sad benchmark for America. It could be the moment which defines the decline of our country or it could be the spark which marks an important day. That would be the day that religious Americans stood-up to the liberal bullies who are so determined to use the power of government to silence prayer and every other religious expression of free speech.

“This is a fight which is destined to be fought in America and we think it should begin today.”

From <http://christiansenior.org/press/031407.php>

It’s Dues time for the Cowtown Humanists:

Annual dues are \$24 for an individual, and \$36 for a household (including all family members living at the single address). Each member (or household) who chooses to receive the newsletter and other official notices via E-mail instead of postal mail, will receive a discount of \$6 per year off their annual dues.

For your annual dues you will receive:

- The opportunity to develop your life philosophy.
- The opportunity to plan and work together to protect civil liberties, promote church-state separation, and participate in community service projects.
- The opportunity to form friendships and associations with like-minded persons, who share your values and interests.
- An opportunity to benefit from programs geared to Humanist interests.
- Availability of a Humanist Minister for weddings, namings, memorials, and other services.
- A subscription to our newsletter, *The Cowtown Humanist*.

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