



April

2011

The Humanists of Ft Worth meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist building 901 Page Ave at 7 PM



From The Chair

NOTE: Our April Meeting will be held this month on a **FRIDAY**, not Wednesday. On Friday, the **15th**, we have the honor of hosting the Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism in Amherst, New York, Mr. **Tom Flynn**, as our speaker. His powerpoint presentation is "**The Trouble With Easter.**" Among the books he has written is one entitled "The Trouble With Christmas, and I'm

told that his presentation will be every bit as probing and frank as the book and a great deal more amusing---"laugh-out loud funny."

Mr. Flynn is also Editor of **FREE INQUIRY** which is an outstanding bi-monthly voice of prominent freethinkers in our world and one of my favorite magazines. He serves as well as the Director of the Robert G. Ingersoll Birthplace Museum and of Inquiry Media Productions. We have never had the opportunity and honor of a guest speaker as prominent in the world of Humanism as we have for this next meeting.

All of the ten freethinking groups in North Texas have been invited to this meeting and a very good crowd is expected. Our friend Terry McDonald, chair of Metroplex Atheists, wrote, "I'd like to fill the sanctuary to show him that, even in the bible belt there are enough of us non-believers to warm the heart of any Humanist. See you there."



In this month's podcast Jes Constantine and Todd Stiefel interview Fred Edwards of United Coalition of Reason, debate the concept that vegan priorities are humanist priorities with surprise special guest, Jason Torpy, and highlight the AHA 70th Annual Conference with AHA staffer, Maggie Ardiente.

Jason Torpy is president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers and serves on the Board of Directors of the American Humanist Association. Jason recently wrote an article for the Humanist Network News, AHA's weekly e-zine, called "Why vegan priorities are humanist priorities" In his short article,



Jason claims that you—the enlightened

and rational humanist—will suddenly realize the error of your carnivorous ways. You carnivores, or "carnies," are torturing animals for fun. Harsh? True? Both yes.

Ed comment, I placed this blurb in the newsletter for Russell's benefit

Shining the Light of Reason with Fred Edwards, National Director of the United Coalition of Reason

Fred Edwards has a long history in organized humanism. For 15 years he was executive director of the American Humanist Association and for 12 years editor of the Humanist magazine. Today he serves as national director of the United Coalition of Reason, a national organization that works to raise the visibility of local nontheistic groups all over America. United CoR does this nationally, by conducting campaigns which highlight the fact that nontheists live in every community across America. Locally, we do this by promoting informal cooperation among local groups, hosting local coalition websites, training group leaders, and funding publicity campaigns.

Listen to the Humanist Hour Podcast #60
<http://blog.newhumanist.org.uk/2011/03/new->



Coffee Cups in Hell by MAUREEN DOWD NY Times **Published: March 26, 2011**

It's The Mormon Moment

The Republican Mormons Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman may run for president, braving more questions about whether they wear the sacred undergarment and more resistance from evangelicals who consider Mormonism an affront to Christianity.

TLC just renewed its hit "Sister Wives," and HBO's popular "Big Love" just had its big finale.

On Thursday, "The Book of Mormon," by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the scatological scamps who created "South Park," and Robert Lopez, who co-created "Avenue Q," opened on Broadway in a confetti burst of profanity, blasphemy, hilarity and rapturous reviews. Stone called the musical "an atheist love letter to religion."

Aside from impersonating Jennifer Lopez and Gwyneth Paltrow at the 2000 Oscars, Stone and Parker are known for mercilessly mocking religion, celebrity, phonies and Snooki in their cartoon world with the four potty-mouthed fourth-grade boys from Colorado.

They pushed the limits at Comedy Central when they put the Prophet Muhammad in a bear suit. But as Terry Teachout wrote in The Wall Street Journal: "Making fun of Mormons in front of a Broadway crowd is like shooting trout in a demitasse cup. ... If the title of this show were 'The Quran,' it wouldn't have opened."

Stone and Parker said they were drawn to the Rodgers and Hammerstein and Disney qualities at Mormon sites in Salt Lake City. "Mormonism has this great cheesy aesthetic," Stone told The Journal. "When you watch their videos, it's almost as if they're about to flash a smile at the camera and burst into song. ... Mormon cheesiness is so close to musical cheesiness."

The Mormons in the musical are depicted just as Mormons on "South Park" were — naïve but nice.

There is one song called "Spooky Mormon Hell Dream" featuring Hitler, Jeffrey Dahmer, Johnnie Cochran and a couple of Starbucks coffee cups in hell. (Mormons can't have caffeine.)

The raunchiness is offset by traditional tropes. There's an odd-couple pairing of two 19-year-old missionaries, Elder Price, a golden goody-goody, and Elder Cunningham, a schlubby boy with a penchant for lying; and a cultural collision between white-bread missionaries and Ugandans plagued by AIDS, warlords, maggots and female genital mutilation.

"Africa is nothing like 'The Lion King,'" a befuddled Price says. "I think that movie took a lot of artistic license."

Cunningham manages to baptize a lovely young Ugandan named Nabalungi, but he keeps calling her Neosporin, Noxzema and Neutrogena.

The sly writers send up the church for its belated admission of blacks to temple ceremonies. In 1978, beset by protests, the president of the Mormons announced that God had changed his mind about black people.

But they also send up do-gooding celebrities like Bono and Angelina when the Mormon boys sing "We Are Africa."

Some connected with the production have been monitoring the reaction of the Mormons, but so far, the church has put out one bland statement, and some Mormons who have seen the show told reporters they were pleasantly surprised. At least it doesn't dwell on polygamy, they said, and its ribald humor seems braced by traditional values and affection for the Mormon characters.

If you already find some aspects of Mormonism exotic and strange — including its start with crystal-gazing Joseph Smith, the buried gold tablets with hieroglyphics and an angel named Moroni — the musical won't assuage your doubts.

Smith claimed Jesus appeared to him in upstate New York. "Did you know that Jesus lived here in the USA?" calls out a Mormon boy in the musical. Elder Cunningham offers this lyric about the crucifixion: "Jesus knew he had to man up."

Elder Price sings, "I believe that God lives on a planet called Kolob." In Mormon scripture, God lived on or near Kolob — the inspiration for the planet Kobol in "Battlestar Galactica," written by Glen Larson, a Mormon.

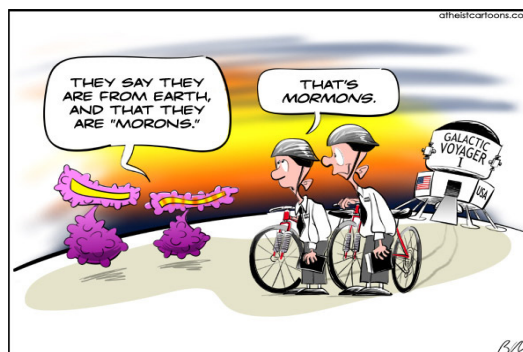
The authoritarian Mormon church still does not have equal status for women, blacks and certainly not gays. It provided the majority of the funding for California's Prop 8 against same-sex marriage.

The Mormon boys do a tap dance wearing glittery pink vests, singing about how to switch off feeling gay: "Go flick; it's a nifty little Mormon trick."

When Ugandans cannot relate to Mormon history, Cunningham blends in other myths from "Lord of the Rings" and "Star Wars," putting the Angel Moroni on the Death Star.

In the end, the message is not against Mormonism but literalism: that whatever our different myths, metaphors and rituals, the real purpose of religion is to give us a higher purpose and a sense of compassion in the universe.

"The moral," the writer Andrew Sullivan observed on opening night, "is that religion is both insane and necessary at the same time."



Are Aborted Fetus Cells Helping to Make Your Diet Pepsi Sweeter?

The Christian media is swarming with accusations that [Senomyx](#), a San Diego-based research and development company, whose clients include food heavy-hitters Nestle, Campbell's Soup, Kraft Foods, and PepsiCo, is conducting research with [HEK293](#), originally derived from human embryonic kidney cells

These accusations began with an [action](#) alert issued by Largo, Florida-based [Children of God for Life](#), a nonprofit, pro-life organization focused on the "bioethical issues of human cloning, embryonic, and fetal tissue research." In the alert, Debi Vinnedge, executive director of Children of God, calls for the public to "boycott products of major food companies that are partnering with Senomyx, a biotech company that produces artificial flavor enhancers, unless the company stops using aborted fetal cell lines to test their products."

On the company website, Senomyx describes research to find new ways to improve food flavors by taking advantage of the mouth's taste receptors. If you recall junior high school biology, the mouth can really taste only five flavors -- sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and glutamate. The company is using isolated human taste receptors in the form of proteins to identify flavors and enhance them.

Gwen Rosenberg, vice president of investor relations and corporate communications for Senomyx, described the process as "basically a robotic tasting system." She depicted rows of little plastic square dishes with hundreds of tiny indentations in each dish. A protein is placed in each indentation, then a flavor. If the protein reacts to the flavor, the results are charted. If the new flavor (of which the company has more than 800,000) is successful with the protein test, the company then conducts taste tests with (live) adult humans.

Asked about the action alert, Rosenberg said, "We don't discuss details of our research, but you won't find anything on our website about HEK293." I asked Rosenberg if Senomyx had a position on stem cell research. "We've never been asked that," she replied, "We don't have a position on anything. We're dedicated to finding new flavors to reduce sugars and reduce salt. Our focus is to help consumers with diabetes or high blood pressure have a better quality of life."

Though Rosenberg states there is nothing on the company website linking Senomyx with HEK293, a little Googling turned up a [patent](#) issued in 2008 for "Recombinant Methods for Expressing a Functional Sweet Taste Receptor," in which a line item mentions HEK293.



The Concordat between the Vatican and the Nazis, Cardinal Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli (later to become Pope Pius XII) signs the Concordat between Nazi Germany and the Vatican at a formal ceremony in Rome on 20 July 1933. Nazi Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen sits at the left, Pacelli in the middle, and the Rudolf Buttmann sits at the right. The Concordat effectively legitimized Hitler and the Nazi government to the eyes of Catholicism, Christianity, and the world.

Teenagers Speak Up for Lack of Faith NY Times April 3, 2011

PANAMA CITY, Fla. — Every other Wednesday, right after school at 2:45, the newest club at Rutherford High, the [atheist club](#), meets in Room 13-211.

Last Wednesday, Jim Dickey, the president, started out by asking his fellow student [atheists](#) (there are a few agnostics, too) whether they wanted to put together an all-atheist Ultimate Frisbee team for a charity event.

We can pay the entry fee from the club treasury," said Michael Creamer, the atheists' faculty adviser, who urged them to take part.

Club members discussed what to do about Faith Week. Rutherford High's two Christian clubs will be sponsoring a series of before-school prayer circles around the flagpole this week, and several of the atheists felt a need to respond in some way. "We can set up informational tables near the flagpole and do our own speeches," said Mr. Creamer, who suggested waiting a few weeks. "Remember, we're not trying to be confrontational; this will be a counterpoint."

Mr. Creamer, 47, an English teacher and longtime atheist who grew up in a family of Free Will Baptists, is constantly urging club members to "be friendly, put on those smiles — people don't expect that from atheists."

The Christians and atheists at Rutherford High get along better than some might expect. Joshua Mercer, a senior, who is president of [Ignite](#), a Christian club, and Jim, the atheist president, are close friends. They love comparing philosophies, and giving each other a hard time. "We like to go to Taco Bell together," Joshua said.

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Still, he worries about Jim and the other atheists. “If they don’t accept Jesus Christ as a savior, they will definitely go to hell,” said Joshua, who rises at 4:30 each morning to read [the Bible](#) with his grandmother.

Joshua believes there is still time for Jim. “Jim could change,” he said. “If he will accept Jesus in his heart, he has a free ride to heaven.”

There have long been college atheist clubs, and at present there are an estimated 240 nationwide, said J. T. Eberhard, 29, of the national [Secular Student Alliance](#). But recently they have been springing up at high schools. In the last three months, the number has risen to 21 from 12, Mr. Eberhard said.

The alliance, which is based in Columbus, Ohio, provides support services to atheist organizations. Several months ago, the [Stiefel Freethought Foundation](#) donated \$50,000, enabling Mr. Eberhard to organize full time at high schools. His target is 50 clubs by year’s end.

The federal law permitting extracurricular clubs to use public schools before and after hours was passed in 1984 after lobbying by conservative church groups. Bible study clubs grew fruitful and multiplied, replenishing the Christian faith throughout the land. Then things took a turn to the left. The law required equal access, and gay-straight clubs started popping up. And now this.

“That was an eye-opener for us,” said Karen Harrell, the head of Rutherford’s math department, who serves as the sponsor for Ignite. Her husband, Kirk, is a gym teacher who is adviser for the other religious club, the [Fellowship of Christian Athletes](#).

“Some of our students didn’t understand that there are people who don’t believe in God,” Mrs. Harrell said.

At one point, Mr. Creamer suggested that the clubs get together and discuss their beliefs, but Mrs. Harrell, who attends [Hiland Park Baptist Church](#), declined, fearing it would turn into a debate. “My reaction is faith in Jesus Christ is not at all logical,” she said. “When your beliefs are based on faith, you’re believing something you can’t see. Being able to prove that scientifically in a debate — it could be hard to win.”

“Our goal,” she said, “is not to confuse anyone.”

Because of its location on the edge of the Old South, people here refer to Panama City as the buckle of the Bible Belt. There are Air Force and naval bases nearby. Often, one of the first questions neighbors ask when meeting someone for the first time is “What church do you belong to?”

A high school atheist club could be a controversial disaster.

A major reason it’s not is Mr. Creamer, the Atticus Finch of Rutherford High. He grew up nearby in a little town called Wausau, and his uncle was the preacher at the Free Will Baptist Church there. He graduated from [Florida State University](#), returned here and has been teaching English at the high school ever since, for 26 years.

People appreciate that he knows his trade. “Students are so engrossed with what he’s teaching,” said Michael Kennedy, the principal, who belongs to [St. Dominic Roman Catholic Church](#). “When I do a walk-through, they don’t even notice I’m there.”

And like Atticus Finch in “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Mr. Creamer has the rare gift of being able to stand up for what he believes without angering people. He may disagree with Mrs. Harrell, but he shows his respect. “She’s a really good math department head,” Mr. Creamer said.

Several years ago he wanted to teach “The Epic of Gilgamesh” in his mythology class. It might have been 5,000 years old, but it was not on the Sunshine State’s approved reading list. Some might have quit; Mr. Creamer began the long and tedious process of pleading his case up the chain of command, until he was called before the local school board. There were board members who were concerned that the epic poem included a few sexual passages. For an hour he stood patiently and politely answering all questions, and then eked out a 3-to-2 win. **Want the rest? go to:**

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/04/education/04winerip.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2&hpw

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