



## Volume Nine Number 7 - August 2007

Meeting at Westside Unitarian Universalist Building 901 Page Ave Ft Worth 7 PM, 2nd Wednesday of each month - August gathering is on the 8th. Many of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria at 5:30 prior to the meeting (8th Ave South of Elizabeth Blvd) Join us if you'd like!

### The topic of this month's discussion is **The Humanist Manifesto (see the following)**

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

**Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.** Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

**Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.** Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

**Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience.** Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

**Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.** We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

**Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.** Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

**Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness.** Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

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## The Supreme Court has barred the courtroom door.

By Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-Presidents Freedom From Religion Foundation

Fasten your seat belts, kids. The stacked Supreme Court is careening to the right, and taking our Constitution along for a very bumpy ride. The Court on Monday ruled the president may do what Congress cannot--use federal tax dollars to promote religion without chance of taxpayer challenge or court review.

James Madison famously wrote that government in a free society may not force a citizen to contribute even "three pence" in support of any establishment of religion. Yet mega taxes have been poured into creating an internal federal "faith-based" bureaucracy that the founding fathers had explicitly precluded in adopting a secular Constitution.

We are the federal taxpayers--the "ordinary taxpayers" as media have put it, joined by FFRF founder Anne Gaylor--who took this challenge, and were denied standing. It's hard not to take that personally! But every American should take this diminution of our rights and the Constitution personally. All of us have been legally disenfranchised.

The Supreme Court has barred the courtroom door. Why deny us the chance to make our case? Clearly, the majority in *Hein v. FFRF* seeks not to uphold the Constitution but to muzzle criticism, and to insulate the Executive Branch from public accountability or judicial scrutiny.

We challenged the creation of "faith-based" offices in the White House and federal cabinets because a secular government should have only a secular agenda. These offices show egregious favoritism toward the funding of faith-based groups over secular groups. Expensive government conferences are offered to churches and religious entities, even including the proverbial free lunch (compliments of taxpayers). "Faith" groups are taken by the hand, and are encouraged and shown how to apply for federal funding simply because they are church groups." Media have compared the faith-based conferences to "revival meetings," since they often include prayer, testimonials, and gospel choirs.

The Court's Roman Catholic majority ruled we could sue only if Congress had explicitly authorized the faith-based offices, but not if the same violation is authorized by the executive branch!

The brief by the Foundation, and the impressive friend-of-the-court briefs, documented the Congressional complicity in funding these faith-based offices for the past six years. In his dissent, Justice Souter observed there is no "logic or precedent" in the false distinction drawn by the Hein majority.

The White House may now use taxpayer money to promote religion without complaint by citizens and without scrutiny by the courts. Talk about an imperial presidency!

This decision leads to an Alice in Wonderland where the Executive Branch is free to violate the Establishment Clause, as long as it takes care to fund its establishments of religion through "discretionary" general appropriations. The decision is an invitation to violate and subvert the Constitution.

For more visit:<http://ffrf.org/news/2007/heinstatement.php>

Following is an excerpt from *American Scientist* with thanks to Dr John Johnson (Ft Worth Humanist member) for bringing it to my attention.

During the 20th century, three polls questioned outstanding scientists about their attitudes toward science and religion. James H. Leuba, a sociologist at Bryn Mawr College, conducted the first in 1914. He polled 400 scientists starred as "greater" in the 1910 *American Men of Science* on the existence of a "personal God" and immortality, or life after death. Leuba defined a personal God as a "God to whom one may pray in the expectation of receiving an answer." He found that 32 percent of these scientists believed in a personal God, and 37 percent believed in immortality.

Leuba repeated basically the same questionnaire in 1933. Belief in a personal God among greater scientists had dropped to 13 percent and belief in immortality to 15 percent. In both polls, beliefs in God and immortality were less common among biologists than among physical scientists. Belief in immortality had dropped to 2 percent among greater psychologists in the 1933 poll. Leuba predicted in 1916 that belief in a personal God and in immortality would continue to drop in greater scientists, a forecast clearly borne out by his second poll in 1933, and he further predicted that the figures would fall even more in the future.

Edward J. Larson, professor of law and the history of science at the University of Georgia, and science journalist Larry Witham, both theists, polled National Academy of Sciences members in 1998 and provided further confirmation of Leuba's conjecture.

## Starving The Poor by Noam Chomsky

### From the Khaleej Times

The chaos that derives from the so-called international order can be painful if you are on the receiving end of the power that determines that order's structure. Even tortillas come into play in the ungrand scheme of things.

Recently, in many regions of Mexico, tortilla prices jumped by more than 50 per cent. In January, in Mexico City, tens of thousands of workers and farmers rallied in the Zocalo, the city's central square, to protest the skyrocketing cost of tortillas.

In response, the government of President Felipe Calderon cut a deal with Mexican producers and retailers to limit the price of tortillas and corn flour, very likely a temporary expedient.

In part the price-hike threat to the food staple for Mexican workers and the poor is what we might call the ethanol effect — a consequence of the US stampede to corn-based ethanol as an energy substitute for oil, whose major well-springs, of course, are in regions that even more grievously defy international order.

In the United States, too, the ethanol effect has raised food prices over a broad range, including other crops, livestock and poultry.

The connection between instability in the Middle East and the cost of feeding a family in the Americas isn't direct, of course. But as with all international trade, power tilts the balance. A leading goal of US foreign policy has long been to create a global order in which US corporations have free access to markets, resources and investment opportunities. The objective is commonly called "free trade," a posture that collapses quickly on examination.

It's not unlike what Britain, a predecessor in world domination, imagined during the latter part of the 19th century, when it embraced free trade, after 150 years of state intervention and violence had helped the nation achieve far greater industrial power than any rival.

The United States has followed much the same pattern. Generally, great powers are willing to enter into some limited degree of free trade when they're convinced that the economic interests under their protection are going to do well. That has been, and remains, a primary feature of the international order.

The ethanol boom fits the pattern.

As discussed by agricultural economists C Ford Runge and Benjamin Senauer in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "the biofuel industry has long been dominated not by market forces but by politics and the interests of a few large companies," in large part Archer Daniels Midland, the major ethanol producer. Ethanol production is feasible thanks to substantial state subsidies and very high tariffs to exclude much cheaper and more efficient sugar-based Brazilian ethanol.

In March, during President Bush's trip to Latin America, the one heralded achievement was a deal with Brazil on joint production of ethanol. But Bush, while spouting free-trade rhetoric for others in the conventional manner, emphasized forcefully that the high tariff to protect US producers would remain, of course along with the many forms of government subsidy for the industry.

Despite the huge, taxpayer-supported agricultural subsidies, the prices of corn — and tortillas — have been climbing rapidly. One factor is that industrial users of imported US corn increasingly purchase cheaper Mexican varieties used for tortillas, raising prices.

The 1994 US-sponsored NAFTA agreement may also play a significant role, one that is likely to increase. An unlevel-playing-field impact of NAFTA was to flood Mexico with highly subsidised agribusiness exports, driving Mexican producers off the land.

Mexican economist Carlos Salas reviews data showing that after a steady rise until 1993, agricultural employment began to decline when NAFTA came into force, primarily among corn producers — a direct consequence of NAFTA, he and other economists conclude. One-sixth of the Mexican agricultural work force has been displaced in the NAFTA years, a process that is continuing, depressing wages in other sectors of the economy and impelling emigration to the United States. Max Correa, secretary-general of the group Central Campesina Cardenista, estimates that "for every five tons bought from foreign producers, one campesino becomes a candidate for migration."

It is, presumably, more than coincidental that President Clinton militarised the Mexican border, previously quite open, in 1994, along with implementation of NAFTA.

The "free trade" regime drives Mexico from self-sufficiency in food towards dependency on US exports. And as the price of corn goes up in the United States, stimulated by corporate power and state intervention, one can anticipate that the price of staples may continue its sharp rise in Mexico.

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Increasingly, biofuels are likely to "starve the poor" around the world, according to Runge and Senauer, as staples are converted to ethanol production for the privileged — cassava in sub-Saharan Africa, to take one ominous example. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, tropical forests are cleared and burned for oil palms destined for biofuel, and there are threatening environmental effects from input-rich production of corn-based ethanol in the United States as well.

The high price of tortillas and other, crueller vagaries of the international order illustrate the interconnectedness of events, from the Middle East to the Middle West, and the urgency of establishing trade based on true democratic agreements among people, and not interests whose principal hunger is for profit for corporate interests protected and subsidised by the state they largely dominate, whatever the human cost.  
[www.chomsky.org](http://www.chomsky.org)

**PRADOPOLIS, Brazil** -- Outside the cavernous Sao Martinho refinery, the air smells of molasses as a quarter-mile-long caravan of trucks piled high with sugar cane waits to unload cargo, signs that the world's largest sugar harvest is moving into high gear.

Such bumper sugar crops have often meant world-wide gluts, low prices and headaches for politicians in the more than 100 countries where sugar cane is grown, but not this year in Brazil. About half the cane brought here will be made into ethanol as part of a 30-year gamble to substitute fuels made from crops for imported oil.

As international oil prices soar, that bet has put Brazil at the forefront of a "biofuels" movement in which many countries view sugar cane, corn, soybeans, beets, cornstalks and native grasses as cleaner, money-saving substitutes for oil produced in politically unstable countries. Ethanol is higher in power-producing octane than most gasoline and can reduce tailpipe emissions of carbon monoxide and harmful particulates.

In the United States, the sugar-cane industry has had little incentive to diversify into ethanol production because import quotas support U.S. sugar prices far above world levels. Expansion of sugar cane acreage beyond Hawaii, Florida and the Gulf Coast is limited by the need for a long, frost-free growing season.

Most U.S.-produced ethanol is now made from ground corn in a process that has been faulted as

inefficient. Corn yields less sugar per acre than sugar cane, and the refining uses substantial amounts of energy. To keep ethanol competitive with gasoline, major refiners such as **Archer Daniels Midland Co.** have relied since the 1970s on a **tax subsidy, now 51 cents a gallon.** From: The Washington Post

## Scientology Beliefs

Sydney July 9, 2007 An Australian woman accused of murdering her father and sister was apparently denied psychiatric treatment because of her parents' Scientology beliefs, a court heard on Monday.

The 25-year-old woman, who cannot be named, appeared briefly in court on Monday to be charged for the stabbing attacks at her family home in a Sydney suburb, the Australian Associated Press reported.

She made no application for bail because she was unfit to be interviewed, her lawyer Wade Bloomfield told the court.

Consultant psychiatrist Mark Cross said in a report that the woman was diagnosed with a psychotic illness at Bankstown Hospital in late 2006.

**KAMPALA (Reuters)** - Ugandan police are holding a Ghanaian preacher over a stage magic device they fear may dupe people into believing they have experienced miracles.

Customs officials seized the Electric Touch device -- which magicians use to give small electric shocks to volunteers -- from "Prophet" Obiri Yeboah at the airport last week, the state owned New Vision daily reported Tuesday.

The pastor heads one of many Pentecostal churches in Uganda, receiving large sums of money from congregations seeking miracle cures for diseases or help with financial problems.

The Electric Touch device is usually sold in magic shops alongside card tricks, magic coins and disappearing balls.

"With a simple touch, make a fluorescent bulb glow on and off at your command, make confetti move, charge a spoon and watch as it shocks a volunteer!" says one online magic shop selling the device.

"People could be duped to think it is a miracle," the New Vision quoted Civil Aviation Authority security chief Herman Owomugisha as saying.

Officials are worried about the proliferation of "miracle" churches in Uganda, many of which claim to cure HIV/AIDS.



## Send an email to your senator now, expressing your disappointment in the Senate decision to invite a Hindu to open the session with prayer.

On Thursday, a Hindu chaplain from Reno, Nevada, by the name of Rajan Zed is scheduled to deliver the opening prayer in the U.S. Senate. Zed tells the Las Vegas Sun that in his prayer he will likely include references to ancient Hindu scriptures, including Rig Veda, Upanishads, and Bhagavad-Gita. Historians believe it will be the first Hindu prayer ever read at the Senate since it was formed in 1789.

WallBuilders president David Barton is questioning why the U.S. government is seeking the invocation of a non-monotheistic god. Barton points out that since Hindus worship multiple gods, the prayer will be completely outside the American paradigm, flying in the face of the American motto "One Nation Under God."

### TAKE ACTION – Call your Senators at 202-224-3121

"In Hindu, you have not one God, but many, many, many, many, many gods," the Christian historian explains. "And certainly that was never in the minds of those who did the Constitution, did the Declaration [of Independence] when they talked about Creator -- that's not one that fits here because we don't know which creator we're talking about within the Hindu religion."

### TAKE ACTION – [Click here](#) to send your E-mail today!

Barton says given the fact that Hindus are a tiny constituency of the American public, he questions the motivation of Senate leaders. "This is not a religion that has produced great things in the world," he observes. "You look at India, you look at Nepal -- there's persecution going in both of those countries that is gendered by the religious belief that is present there, and Hindu dominates in both of those countries."

And while Barton acknowledges there is not constitutional problem with a Hindu prayer in the Senate, he wonders about the political side of it. "One definitely wonders about the pragmatic side of it," he says. "What is the message, and why is the message needed? And will it actually communicate anything other than engender with folks like me a lot of questions?" Christians have lost their bid to express their own faith in a public prayer.

Zed is reportedly the first Hindu to deliver opening prayers in an American state legislature, having done so in both the Nevada State Assembly and Nevada State Senate earlier this year. He has stated that Thursday's prayer will be "universal in approach," despite being drawn from Hindu religious texts.

[American Family Association](#) | P O Drawer 2440 | Tupelo, MS 38803 | 1-662-844-5036  
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Thanks to Kevin Metcalf of the Metroplex Atheists for this post.

Editor's comment — I agree with Donald Wildman (The head of this intolerant bunch), but I'd like to go further and eliminate any opening prayer at the beginning of any legislative session.

## The Return Of Seriousness?

Having had some time to digest my three weeks in Europe, I am struck by the extent to which the European political and media culture is generally sophisticated and serious. During the French election and Gordon Brown's ascension there was no talk of how gay marriage posed a threat to Western Civilization, no debate over evolution, not a single word about whether a woman's right to choose should be revoked, and the politicians never argued over whose fealty to god was stronger. With decades of experience fighting terrorism, Europeans are fully engaged in the intelligence and police work necessary to, if not eliminate the threat, greatly reduce the risks, and the citizenry do not live in fear. The media in Europe is much more aggressive than in the U.S., and the tough questions are almost always asked.

None of this is meant to romanticize Europe and European political culture. Europeans have plenty of contradictions and serious problems of their own. The parliamentary systems they employ often end up in gridlock, the assimilation of Muslim immigrants has been terribly slow, and there are serious structural issues in many of their economies that will be difficult to address. But I am confident that the Europeans will ultimately be up to the task; talk of the "demise of Europe", particularly by commentators on America's political right, is extremely overblown.

When you contrast the seriousness and sophistication of European political and media culture with the last six plus years in the States, America comes out looking infantile.

On issue after issue American politics has been reduced to soundbites best befitting a grade B movie or a network sitcom. More time has been spent debating a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage than on some of our biggest national security issues. More time has been spent rallying against immigration reform than on global warming. While much of the blame for the debasing of American political culture rests with the GOP and the rightwing noise machine that supports it, the Democrats have not been free of blame. They have been cowed into defensiveness and posturing of their own.

There are encouraging signs, however, that the American people are tired of the level to which our political discourse has sunk and a return to seriousness is imminent. Bush's approval ratings are at historic lows and there is a real sense that people finally see through all of the lies, stupidity, and incompetence of this Administration (according to the Pew Research Center, "incompetent" is the word most people now associate with President Bush).

Last week I was ecstatic to read about the [TV anchor-woman](#) who refused to cover the Paris Hilton saga and instead continued with a discussion about serious issues. As always, the blogosphere is ahead of the mainstream media, and beginning to do investigative reporting of its own that is top-notch. While this medium was in its infancy during the 2004 campaign, it showed its strength in 2006, and it will be an even more powerful force in 2008.

The Democratic "big three" – Obama, Clinton, and Edwards – are all serious figures who have helped to raise the political discourse to a more sophisticated level. No one can accuse any of them of being ideologues. On the GOP side I wish I could say the same thing about the top contenders – Giuliani, McCain, Romney, and Thompson – but I can't. Aside from McCain, who is a serious person regardless of one's opinion of his politics, the others have displayed many of the same traits that have gotten us into the messes we now face. Given Romney's bizarre statement that he wants to double the size of Guantanamo (for no apparent reason other than to sound tough), and Rudy's being unaware that North Korea's nuclear program is farther along than Iran's, and Fred Thompson's sheer vacuity, one can only hope that some serious GOP politicians are waiting to enter the fray.

Above all I want the 2008 campaign to be focused on serious issues by serious people, regardless of party. Anything less would be a blow to America and the world.

Jason Scorse Voices of Reason



**The Humanists of Ft Worth has instituted a movie showing on the Last Saturday of each month. July featured Dr Strangelove and was attended by 23 local non-theists. Let's make August's gathering even better. This is a great venue to meet and socialize with others who feel as we do about issues of mutual concern.**

**Your officers may be contacted as follows:**

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