

COWTOWN



HUMANIST

December

2009

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**

This month's meeting will be held with the Tarrant County A.C.L.U. At a place to be determined

Our President, Dick Trice will email all members and friends with the Information

Please try to be there for their Christmas, and our winter solstice festivities

Boycott Gap, Old Navy and Banana Republic this Christmas

From the American Family Association

AFA is calling for a limited two-month boycott of Gap, Old Navy and Banana Republic, the three stores owned by San Francisco-based Gap Inc., over the company's censorship of the word "Christmas."

The boycott is part of our ongoing campaign to encourage businesses, communities and individuals to put Christ back in Christmas. The boycott runs from November 1 through Christmas Day.

For years, Gap has refused to use the word Christmas in its television commercials, newspaper ads and in-store promotions, despite tens of thousands of consumer requests to recognize Christmas and in spite of repeated requests from AFA to do the same.

Last year, Gap issued this politically-correct statement to Christmas shoppers: "Gap recognizes that many traditions are celebrated throughout this season and we feel it is important to display holiday signage that is inclusive to everyone."

Christmas is special because of Jesus. It's not just a "winter holiday." For millions of Americans the giving and receiving of gifts is in honor of the One who gave Himself. For the Gap to pretend that isn't the foundation of the Christmas season is political correctness at best and religious bigotry at worst.

he Gap is censoring the word Christmas, pure and simple. Yet the company wants all the people who celebrate Christmas to do their shopping at its stores? Until Gap proves it recognizes Christmas by using it in their newspaper, radio, television advertising or in-store signage, the boycott will be promoted. In the past AFA has played a part in convincing other retailers to change their approach.

For example, Sears backed away from its censorship of the word "Christmas" and now even offers a "Christmas Club" on its website.

Take Action

[Sign the Boycott Gap Pledge.](#) AFA will regularly update Gap on how many people have signed the pledge.

[Print out the Boycott Gap "pass along" sheet](#) and distribute it to family, friends, and Sunday school members.

Where will you shop this holiday season? Your newsletter editor.

To read more of this nonsense go to afa.net

The new crybaby theists

MICHAEL BRULL *November 5, 2009*

Greg Craven attacks one of the terrible “infestations” we face today: being “beset by atheists”. Craven’s article was remarkable for being almost entirely composed of ad hominem attacks on people who disagree with him. Incredibly, Craven declares that the “new atheism” is “so banally derivative of every piece of hate mail ever sent to God that I am amazed Satan has yet to sue for copyright infringement”.

Get it? This is obviously a fairly broad category, yet the long and short is that someone who doesn’t believe in god is plagiarising the devil. Craven goes on to wonder at “atheist bigotry”, such as the view that at the “slightest opportunity”, Catholics would reintroduce the auto da fe. Who can fail to be dazzled at Craven’s obvious framework of pluralism and tolerance?

Whilst Craven’s writings can be easily dismissed as name-calling, they reflect the rise of a new phenomenon. The public and commercial prominence and success of atheist writers such as Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and AC Grayling has been heralded as the rise of a “new atheism”. Yet the response to this could equally be heralded as the rise of a “new theism”.

Facing a new attack with an international audience playing close attention, religions have as little rational argument in their favour as ever. There was a time when they could deal with dissent through more draconian measures: the kind that can still be practiced in, say, Saudi Arabia. Having lost the power of the gun in the West, apologists of religion have a new weapon: being offended.

Rather than confronting (say) Dawkins’ arguments with counter-arguments, people like Craven, and many others like him, instead cry out: why are you picking on us? All we want is for you to respect our beliefs. And so, the crybaby theists hide behind the demand for respect, which sounds reasonable enough. The more shameless – and their ranks are represented in many religions, such as Muslims, Christians and Jews – complain that when someone criticises their religious faith, the people who belong to that religion are being subjected to abuse.

The bottom line is that such special pleading is a way for theists to avoid answering their critics. The cry that religious beliefs are not being treated respectfully often demonstrates incredible arrogance and hypocrisy.

From the New Age Times (Australia)

For the rest of the article cut and paste:

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/the-new-crybaby-theists-20091105-hyyc.html>

A worthwhile Audio interview from Air America featuring Greg Epstein Humanist chaplain at Harvard University

Cut and Paste:

<http://airamerica.com/ondemand/10-27-2009/lionel-greg-epstein/>

Dear Friends,

Over and over I hear from atheists and agnostics around the country “I’m so glad I found you. I thought I was the only one who felt this way about religion.”

To be the only freethinker in a family or community of religionists can be a lonely business. The nonreligious often feel like an endangered species in the East African community member states.

Religions are difficult to talk about—that’s part of the problem. We believe in religious freedom, but not to the extent that religious beliefs should be imposed upon others. Unfortunately, if we look around ourselves realistically, many of our problems today are caused by just that. Those that think they are possessed of the “one true religion” assume they are entitled to impose their beliefs upon others. We disagree.

After centuries of religious warfare in Europe, modern civilization was built on the concept of secularism – the separation of religion from the public sphere. With the problem of terrorism, and the even greater problems caused by the “war on terror”, many of the pillars on which our civilization was built are eroding.

Our liberties are being curtailed by draconian legislation. Internationally, the rule of law is being disregarded. Rational thought is no longer considered paramount. Secularism has been eroded and replaced by tacit endorsement of all forms of religion, especially in education. Religious intolerance is increasing, as is social disharmony.

We aim to reverse these trends and reassert the ideal of establishing truth through reason and observation. We aim to re-establish the ideal that represents the only real alternative to sectarian strife – the ideal of secularism, based on the universal values of honesty, compassion, freedom and justice. In view of the many problems that humanity faces in the 21st century, this is a critical task. We need your support, and your help.

We invite you at this perilous time for the future of separation of church and state to join the Atheist Association of Uganda, which has been working in closed doors nationally and effectively since 2004 to promote free thought and to keep state and church separate.

Thank you
Masembe Paul (Mr)
President, AAU (Atheists Association of Uganda)

Cut and Paste for more: www.aauganda.net/

The Lethal Injection College Fund

Published on Friday, November 13, 2009 by [The San Francisco Chronicle](#)

Here's a modestly clever idea that will never come to pass in a thousand years because it's absolutely *not* the way modern life or America work right now, but it's nevertheless all sorts of delightfully ironic fun to ponder anyway.

I'm reading a bit about how our fine, God-loving nation just executed John Allen Muhammad, aka the Washington D.C. sniper, injected his remorseless flesh with a megadose of sodium pentothal as dozens of people actually chose to sit behind a glass wall and watch him writhe and twitch and die sans any final statement or single sign of penitence or satisfying explanation as to his murderous actions.

If you like, you can read the story [right now](#) on this fair site, and then jump to the bottom where you will certainly find a reeking cesspool of some of the most nasty, disturbing anonymous comments from fine, God-fearing Americans, and then proceed calmly to feeling utterly soiled, disgusted and sad about the human race as a whole.

Here's a better idea: Skip that, and instead check out [the recent study](#) from the Death Penalty Information Center, which states that after all court costs, fees and various social machinations are factored in, the average death sentence costs each state that supports it about \$30 million *per inmate*, running well into hundreds of millions in wasted taxpayer dollars every year.

I say "wasted" because the study proves that, even from a simple economic perspective, the death penalty is ridiculous and culturally debilitating, and the various states in question could save hundreds of millions a year simply by locking the prisoner up for life.

To be honest, the first idea to occur to me wasn't even all that clever. I initially wondered what would happen if you took, say, 30 of the nastiest, most hateful, eye-for-an-eye death penalty supporters and anonymous commenters in America today, and made them the following offer:

I will hereby give each of you \$1 million if you agree that we will *not* kill this insane, murderous criminal, and instead just let him rot in prison for the rest of his life without a chance of parole. A million bucks, all for you. Or, we kill him, waste the \$30 million and you get nothing.

Do you know how many would accept? Of course you do. *All of them*. Which means, for most, support of the death penalty is no serious moral conviction at all; it's merely an ugly, black hunk of reactionary spittle, the bleak human vengeance synapse writ large, something reptilian and small and just about as far from our often hypocritical concepts of God and forgiveness, compassion and understanding, as you can possibly get.

Thankfully, this admittedly spiteful thought soon passed and quickly led to the wider idea I mentioned at the top of this column.

Do you know what \$30 million can buy these days?

What your average cash-strapped urban playground could do with that kind of money, particularly during a recession?

Here's my simple and semi-obvious idea: what if Washington D.C. had taken the same \$30 million, and instead of killing a single remorseless criminal, created upwards of 600 full-ride college scholarships for lower-income or minority students, at 50 grand each.

In other words, for every criminal a given state is seeking to execute -- like, for example, the Fort Hood killer, who they say might well be [eligible for the death penalty](#) -- we take the same tens of millions in taxpayer dollars and send hundreds of kids through college instead, kids who otherwise would never have been able to afford it and in fact might've ended up on the streets or in prison.

We'll call it the Lethal Injection College Fund. It shall, by its very existence, do nothing less than completely transform the ugly American revenge impulse into something celebratory and optimistic. We shall transmute a brutal crime into a glimmer of hope and possibility. From dark to light. From excrement, flowers. From our most violent nightmares, a hint of grace. What a thing.

In 2008, the United States executed about 30 males*, all by lethal injection, unless they lived in South Carolina, in which case it was electrocution preceded by being forced to stare for two full weeks at a poster of Lindsay Graham. Horrible.

That's nearly *\$1 billion* in taxpayer money wasted last year alone across the U.S. -- mostly in the South -- just to kill a few criminals, just to keep alive a vile and primitive idea that's proven to be not the slightest deterrent to violent crime, and only puts us on par with some of the world's most cruel and sadistic third-world nations. Theoretically, that's 18,000 kids we could've put through college. One dead criminal, or 18,000 educated kids. What a choice.

* 18 in Texas alone

The Rogue Way: How Sarah Palin Made Herself Indispensable While Destroying the GOP

by Max Blumenthal

Sarah Palin's heavily publicized book tour begins in earnest this Monday, but weeks before, her ghostwritten memoir, [Going Rogue: An American Life](#), had already vaulted into the number one position at Amazon. Warming up for a tour that will take her across Middle America in a bus, Palin tested her lines in a November 7th [speech](#) before a crowd of 5,000 anti-abortion activists in Wisconsin. She promptly cited an urban legend as a "disturbing trend," claiming the Treasury Department had moved the phrase "In God We Trust" from presidential dollar coins. (The rumor most likely originated with a 2006 [story](#) on the far-right website WorldNetDaily.)

In fact, a suggested alteration in its position on the coin was shot down in 2007 after pressure from Democratic Senator Robert Byrd.

Nonetheless, Palin did not hesitate to take up this "controversy," however false, since it conveniently pits a tyrannical, God-destroying, secular big government against humble God-fearing folk. In doing so, of course, she presented herself as this nation's leading defender of the faith.

In a Republican Party hoping to rebound in 2010 on the strength of a newly energized and ideologically aroused conservative grassroots, Palin's influence is now unparalleled. Through her Twitter account, she was the one who pushed the rumor of "death panels" into the national healthcare debate, prompting the White House to issue a series of defensive responses. Unfazed by its absurdity, she [repeated](#) the charge in her recent speech in Wisconsin. In a special congressional election in New York's 23rd congressional district, Palin's [endorsement](#) of Doug Hoffman, an unknown far-right third-party candidate, helped force a popular moderate Republican politician, Dede Scozzafava, from the race. In the end, Palin's ideological purge in upstate New York led to an improbable Democratic victory, the first in that GOP-heavy district in more than 100 years.

According to an October 19th [Gallup poll](#), the former governor of Alaska has become one of the most polarizing and unpopular politicians in the country. Since she quit the governorship to pursue her lucrative book deal, a move that upset many in Alaska's Republican leadership and cost the state's taxpayers [almost \\$200,000](#), her unfavorability rating has spiked to 50% while her favorability has sunk to 40%, again according to Gallup's figures. (The only nationally-known politician who is less popular right now, according to the poll, is John Edwards, the former two-term senator who fathered a child out of wedlock and paid his mistress hush money while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination on a social justice platform.)

If Palin is indeed a cancer on the GOP, why can't the Republican establishment retire her to a quiet life of moose hunting in the political wilderness? Why has her appeal only increased in the wake of her catastrophic political expeditions? Why won't she listen to, or abide by, conventional political wisdom?

The answer lies beyond the realm of polls and punditry in the political psychology of the movement that animates and, to a great degree, controls, the Republican grassroots -- a uniquely evangelical subculture defined by the personal crises of its believers and their perceived persecution at the hands of cosmopolitan elites.

If McCain had taken his preferred choice for a running mate in 2008, he would have chosen Joseph Lieberman, the turncoat Democrat and his best friend in the Senate. But with the base of the Republican Party subsumed by a Christian right that detested the senator, his advisors urged him to choose the untested, virtually unknown Alaskan governor to bring the faithful back to him. Their gam-

and activists, Tom Minnery of the Christian right outfit Focus on the Family recalled, "People were on their seats applauding cheering, yelling... that room was electrified."

The gun-toting, snowmobile-cruising former beauty queen became an instant cultural icon. Little understood by those outside this culture was her religious worldview, cultivated during the 20 years she spent worshipping at the Wasilla Assembly of God, a right-wing Pentecostal church in her hometown north of Anchorage. When I visited the church in October 2008, a pastor from Kenya, Bishop Thomas Muthee, was at the podium comparing Palin to Queen Esther, the biblical queen who used her wiles to intercede for her people. The reference was clear enough: Palin, the former beauty pageant contestant who had chosen Esther as her biblical role model when she first entered politics, would topple America's secular tyrants, leading her people, the true Christians, into the kingdom. As he concluded his sermon, Muthee gesticulated wildly and spoke in tongues, urging parishioners to "come against the spirit of witchcraft as the body of Christ."

Once Palin was nominated, her sixteen-year-old daughter Bristol (named for Bristol Bay, Alaska) became the subject of ferocious media scrutiny. She had, it turned out, been impregnated by Levi Johnston, a local eighteen-year-old jock who identified himself on his MySpace page as "a f**kin' redneck." To media outsiders, Bristol's out-of-wedlock pregnancy was particularly startling, given Palin's advocacy of abstinence-only education. In the eyes of many liberals, Palin had been revealed as but another family-values hypocrite, but to members of the Christian right, she was something quite different -- a glamorized version of themselves. As the Palin family became a staple of late-night comedy monologues, Palin fought back against the secular enemy, slamming David Letterman for "sexually perverted jokes" about her daughter. With that, the movement's adulation for her overflowed.

Palin's daughter's drama caught vividly a culture of personal crisis that defines so many evangelical communities across the country. That culture is described in a landmark congressionally funded study of adolescent behavior, [Add Health](#), revealing that white evangelical women like Bristol Palin lose their virginity, on average, at age 16 -- earlier, that is, than any group except black Protestants.

Another recent study by sociologists Peter Bearman and Hannah Bruckner notes that over half of evangelical girls who have pledged to maintain their virginity until marriage wind up having sex before marriage, and with a man other than their future husband

Bearman and Bruckner also disclose that communities with the highest population of girls who attend so-called purity balls, where they vow chastity until marriage before their fathers in a prom-like religious ceremony, also have some of the country's highest rates of

Australian Senator brands Scientology a 'criminal organisation'

Anne Wright From: AAP
November 18, 2009

PRIME Minister Kevin Rudd says he has concerns about the Church of Scientology but wants to see what material independent senator Nick Xenophon has before committing to a parliamentary inquiry.

Senator Xenophon yesterday accused the Church of Scientology of being a criminal organisation.

The South Australian parliamentarian said he had been contacted by a number of former Scientologists, after he questioned the organisation's tax exempt status in a recent television interview.

"They have provided long and detailed letters to me about the workings of this organisation," he told the Senate.

"These people rightly see themselves as victims of Scientology."

Senator Xenophon said their correspondence implicated the organisation in a range of crimes, including forced imprisonment, coerced abortions, embezzlement of church funds, physical violence, intimidation and blackmail.

"I am deeply concerned about this organisation and the devastating impact it can have on its followers," he said.

Asked about the senator's claims, Mr Rudd described them as "grave allegations".

"Many people in Australia have real concerns about Scientology," Mr Rudd said.

"I share some of those concerns. Let us proceed carefully and look carefully at the material he has provided before we make a decision on further parliamentary action."

Asked about the Church of Scientology's tax exempt status, Mr Rudd said he was advised the High Court had dealt with the matter back in the 1980s.

"I am so advised, but I stand to be corrected," he said.

"Therefore the true question is the actual nature of the operations that involve Scientology now.

"I don't want to rush into any judgment on this, other than to say he's (Senator Xenophon) raised concerns and made some serious allegations."

Senator Xenophon said the Church of Scientology had been convicted of fraud in France and was facing similar charges in Belgium.

A number of the organisation's former high-ranking executives in the US had also recently spoken out against its leader, David Miscavige, saying they had seen him assaulting staff and urging others to do the same, he said.

"What we are seeing is a worldwide pattern of abuse and criminality," Senator Xenophon said.

"On the body of evidence, this is not happening by accident, it is happening by design.

"Scientology is not a religious organisation, it is a criminal organisation that hides behind its so-called religious beliefs."

The Church of Scientology issued a statement to the media responding to Senator Xenophon's comments.

"This is an outrageous abuse of Parliamentary privilege from a Senator would not even meet with Church representatives several months ago to discuss his concerns," the statement read.

"Senator Xenophon's attempt to marginalise Scientologists by saying that they should not be believed, is fascistic and violates freedom of speech and the right to religious beliefs."

Notable Scientologists:

Cut and Paste: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Scientologists

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