

THE COWTOWN HUMANIST JANUARY 2006

MARY HUNTER TO SPEAK ON INTELLIGENT DESIGN AT JANUARY 11 MEETING

My bones proclaim a story of incompetent design.

My back still hurts, my sinus clogs, my teeth just won't align.

If I had drawn the blueprint I would certainly resign.

Incompetent Design!

Evo-Evo Evolution. Design is but a mere illusion.

Darwin sparked our revolution. Science shall prevail!

--Donald U. Wise, Emeritus Prof. of Geol., U. Mass.

The above ditty, sung to the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic", was composed for the Dec. 5 meeting of the Geological Society of America. With a majority of Americans favoring one form or another of creationism, many scientists have come to the conclusion that something more than rational argument is needed if Darwinian theory is to gain greater acceptance. Humor and ridicule are the weapons they have introduced into the fight with the fundamentalists.

Currently, the fundamentalists have to be feeling pretty low after the whacking they took from Judge John E. Jones III in the Dover, PA case. His 139-page opinion should have taken the wind out of the sails of Intelligent Design "theory" for just about anyone who has an appreciation for the scientific method. An added fillip for Darwinists is the fact that Jones is a life-long Republican and a George W. Bush appointee. Conservatives can't complain, in this instance, about a liberal judge gone amok.

The decision should not have surprised anyone. The Dover decision was only the latest of a string going at least as far back as 1987 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Edwards v. Aguillard* that creationism was a religious view, not science. Judge Jones demonstrated convincingly that ID is a mere spin-off of old-fashioned creationism and that school board members knew that they were engaged in a sham. Hopefully, the fact that Dover may have to pay \$1 million or more in attorney fees of the plaintiffs will help to deter other school boards from trying to sneak creationism into biology classrooms.

ID promptly lost an advocate when Senator Rick Santorum (R.-PA) publicly severed his ties to the Thomas More Law Center, which had defended the Dover board. Santorum told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, he had been troubled by court testimony that showed some board members were motivated by religion. The *Inquirer* recalled an op-ed Santorum wrote in the *Washington Times* in 2002 that stated: "Therefore intelligent design is a legitimate scientific theory that should be taught in science classes." [One has to

suspect that political prudence had a hand in the Senator's about-face. He faces a strong Democratic challenge in the 2006 election.] (Science in the News Weekly)

Still in the legal system is a Cobb County, GA, appeal against a federal district court's decision disallowing a sticker on high school biology textbooks that states "evolution is a theory and not a fact." In the light of the Dover decision, it will be rather surprising if the appeals court sides with the county.

Mary Hunter, biology teacher at Highland Park High School, will tell us about the challenges of teaching science in a Bible belt state at our January 11 meeting. Mary holds a B.S. in Zoology from Iowa State University (1972) and an M.S. in biology from UTA (1989). A teacher for the past 28 years, she has taught every major science except geology, advanced chemistry and physics at every level from basic high school biology to the college freshman level. Here is Mary about her experience in her own words:

"As a biology teacher I have always been aware of the problems of teaching evolution in a state where the fundamental Christian community is quite strong. I first became involved in 1974 and have been active in making sure evolution is included in curriculums and taught in class without fear. In the late '80s I went down to Austin to speak in defense of the BSCS textbook, which was taking the most criticism for daring to explain evolution and calling creationism a pseudo-science. (It wasn't approved.) I have been a member of the National Center for Science Education almost since its inception."

It is worth noting that Mary's school, Highland Park, was rated 12th among U.S. public high schools in Newsweek's 2004 ranking of the nation's best. Only five other Texas schools made the top 100 listing.

A NEW FRONT IN THE CULTURE WARS: THE LORD'S WORD

The people who have prepared this book have tried consistently to put the Word of God first and science second. To the best of the author's knowledge the conclusions drawn from observable facts that are presented in this book agree with the Scriptures. If a mistake has been made (which is probable since this book was prepared by humans) and at any point God's Word is not put first, the author apologizes.

--Biology for Christian Schools (Bob Jones University Press)

And that is precisely why a high school science course using the 693-page book as a primary text does not meet the admission standards of the University of California. It does not, argues the university, reflect "knowledge generally accepted in the scientific and educational communities and with which a student at the university level should be conversant." The same, says the university, is true of some other courses—in history, literature and government—offered by Calvary Chapel Christian Schools of Murrieta, a small town south-east of Los Angeles. These courses also rely on books from the Bob Jones University Press and from another Christian publisher, A Beka Books. Several Christian schools and students are now suing the

university system to gain admission, arguing the university is engaged in “viewpoint discrimination,” thereby violating the students’ constitutional right to freedom of speech and religion. The suit is in the federal district court in Los Angeles and could eventually reach the Supreme Court. (Economist magazine)

MODERN DARWINISM’S MORE FLATTERING PORTRAIT OF HUMANITY. Social Darwinists of the 19th century, capitalists all, took what they thought were the lessons of Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* and applied them to human society. Their hard-hearted conclusion, of which a 17th century religious puritan might have been proud, was that people got what they deserved—albeit that the criterion of desert was genetic, rather than moral. The fittest not only survived but prospered. Moreover, the social Darwinists thought that measures to help the poor were wasted, since such people were obviously unfit and thus doomed to sink.

Sadly, the slur stuck. For 100 years Darwinism was associated with a particularly harsh and unpleasant view of the world and, worse, one that was clearly not true—at least, not the whole truth. People certainly compete, but they collaborate, too. They also have compassion for the fallen and frequently try to help them, rather than treading on them. For this sort of behavior, Darwin had no explanation.

Modern Darwinism’s big breakthrough was the identification of the central role of trust in human evolution. People who are related collaborate on the basis of nepotism. It takes outrageous profit or provocation for someone to do down a relative with whom they share a lot of genes. Trust, though, allows the unrelated to collaborate, by keeping score of who does what when, and punishing cheats.

Reconciliation of competition and collaboration bears a remarkable similarity to the sort of Hegelian synthesis beloved of Marxists. Perhaps a bigger one, though, is that the Earth’s most capitalist country, America, is the only place in the rich world that contains a significant group of dissenters from any sort of evolutionary explanation of human behavior at all. But it is also, in its way, a comforting view. It suggests a constant struggle not for existence itself, but between selfishness and altruism—a struggle that neither can win. Human nature is not, to borrow a phrase from Tennyson, red in tooth and claw, and societies built around the idea that it is are doomed to early failure.

Of the three great secular faiths born in the 19th century--Darwinism, Marxism and Freudianism—the second died swiftly and painfully and the third is slipping peacefully away. But Darwinism goes from strength to strength. If its ideas are right, the handful of dust that evolution has shaped into humanity will rarely stray too far off course. And that is, perhaps, a hopeful thought to carry into the New Year. (an edited and much condensed Economist editorial)

HoFW NEWS AND VIEWS

DECEMBER MEETING: Twenty of the membership were present at the December 14 dinner at the Szechuan restaurant. Reed Bilz, Jeff Rodriguez, Marj Bixler, Ray Weill and Audrey Weill entertained with readings appropriate to the occasion. A “fun” questionnaire of 15 questions tested participants’ knowledge of pop culture esoterica.

The board of Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library has suggested that the various groups using the bookshop for meetings pay a small fee to offset expenses incurred by the facility. We will await a decision of the board on the amount of the fee to be assessed before deciding on another donation.

JANUARY MEETING: Fellow HoFW member Mary Hunter will speak to us on January 11 at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library, our usual meeting place. The bookstore is located in the Wedgworth Shopping Center just off Wedgmont Circle North. From I-20 take Granbury Road South to Wedgmont Circle North. Turn left onto Wedgmont Circle North. You will notice a CITGO station on your left. Immediately thereafter turn left again into the Wedgworth Shopping Center. Time: 7:00 p.m.

PRE-MEETING DINNER: Joe's Italian Restaurant 5:30 p.m. across the parking lot from Friend's.

FEBRUARY MEETING: Our February 8 speaker will be State Representative Marc Veasey. Subject: TBA.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE: We will need to elect a new slate of officers at our May meeting. Both your Chairman and Vice Chairman intend to step down at the termination of their terms. The former has served two terms and the latter three terms. It is time, we both feel, for fresh leadership with new ideas about what HoFW should be doing. Needed is a search committee to find potential candidates for these positions. The beauty of serving on a nominating committee is the chance to nominate someone else for office or, a la Dick Cheney, decide that one of your own is the best candidate for office, or if not necessarily the best qualified, one eager to serve the association. So don't be bashful. Please step forward.

TOO MANY BOOKS: If you've got more books than space in your home, time to consider donating some of the surplus to our host. Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library will be happy to receive donations of marketable books.

IDEAS FOR IMPROVING THE NEWSLETTER? Drop a line if you have suggestions for enhancing the value of the Newsletter to the membership. Contributions are welcome. The editor reserves the right to edit and to decide on appropriateness of the submission.

REMINDERS: It's not too late to join HoFW if you're not already a member. Fees are: \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$30 for couples receiving the Newsletter by e-mail; \$36 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy to the next meeting. WestAid will see that it goes to appropriate recipients.

YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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WORTH NOTING

ALITO'S ZEAL FOR PRESIDENTIAL POWER

New documents released yesterday [Dec. 23] provide more evidence that Judge Alito has a skewed view of the allocation of power among the three branches—skewed in favor of presidential power.

One troubling memo concerns domestic wiretaps—a timely topic. In the memo, which he wrote as a lawyer in the Reagan Justice Department, Judge Alito argued that the attorney general should be immune from lawsuits when he illegally wiretaps Americans. Judge Alito argued for taking a step-by-step approach to establishing this principle, much as he argued for an incremental approach to reversing *Roe v. Wade* in another memo.

The Supreme Court flatly rejected Judge Alito's view of the law. In a 1985 ruling, the court rightly concluded that if the attorney general had the sort of immunity Judge Alito favored, it would be an invitation to deny people their constitutional rights.

In a second memo released yesterday [Dec. 23] Judge Alito made another bold proposal for grabbing power for the president. He said that when the president signed bills into law, he should make a "signing statement" about what the law means. By doing so, Judge Alito hoped the president could shift courts' focus away from "legislative intent"—a well-established part of interpreting the meaning of a statute--toward what he called "the president's intent."

...The Senate should determine that Judge Alito is on the side of the Constitution in these battles, not on the side of the presidency—which the latest documents strongly question—before voting to confirm him. (NYT editorial)

RELIGIOUS RIGHT ALL BUT REVERSING ROE V. WADE IN SOUTH DAKOTA: South Dakota, those on both sides of the abortion debate agree, has become one of the hardest states in the country in which to obtain an abortion. The last doctor in South Dakota to perform abortions stopped almost five years ago; the consensus in the medical community is that offering the procedure is not worth the stigma of

being branded a baby killer. [Doctors from Minneapolis periodically fly to Bismarck to do the procedure.] One of three states in the country to have only one abortion provider—North Dakota and Mississippi are the others—South Dakota largely because of a strong antiabortion lobby, is also becoming a leading national laboratory for testing the limits of state laws restricting abortion, both opponents and advocates of abortion rights say. In 2005, the South Dakota legislature passed five laws restricting abortion and new laws are virtually assured for 2006. A twelve member abortion task force has recently suggested that a woman watch an ultrasound of her fetus, that doctors warn women about the psychological and physical dangers of abortion, and that women receive psychological counseling before the abortion, among other measures. “Samuel Alito wrote the blueprint 20 years ago on how to dismantle and eventually overturn *Roe v. Wade*,” says Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL pro-choice America. “If he is confirmed, Alito could cast the decisive vote that allows additional attacks on women’s reproductive freedom from the states to stand.” (WP)

[On the wisdom of mounting constitutional challenges to laws restricting “basic” freedoms, see the Jan/Feb issues of *The Humanist*. Arguing a contrarian view, a board member suggests that pursuing rights through the courts rather than the political process often proves counterproductive in that it energizes the right, irritates an electorate hostile to legislating judges, and eventually leads to restrictions on previously won rights. Worth pondering.]

Those who would give up essential liberty in the pursuit of a little temporary security deserve neither liberty nor security.

--Benjamin Franklin

Now, by the way, any time you hear the United States government talking about wiretap, it requires a wiretap requires a court order. Nothing has changed by the way. When you’re talking about chasing down terrorists, we’re talking about getting a court order before we do so. It’s important for our fellow citizens to understand, when you think Patriot Act, constitutional guarantees are in place when it comes to doing what is necessary to protect our home land, because we value the Constitution.

--George W. Bush, 4/20/04, Buffalo, NY

Section 2 of Article II of our Constitution, which outlines the powers of the executive branch, names the president as the commander in chief of the “Army and Navy of the United States,” and by extension the Air Force and Coast Guard. In this isolated instance, he has absolute power over these services and their members. He is not, however, the commander in chief of private citizens or other legally constituted arms of the federal government, including the National Security Agency, all of which operate under specific legal authority and under specific statutory parameters.

The Sept. 14, 2001, congressional authorization, which declared that “the president has authority under the Constitution to take action to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism,” and which authorized “all necessary and appropriate force” against those involved in 9-11 or threatening future attacks, specifically cited constitutional authority.

The constitution does not convey unlimited regal war-making power on the president at any time, and there’s certainly nothing “necessary and appropriate” about bypassing the executive friendly courts established under the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and modified by the USA Patriot Act.

The president's actions in this instance and his ongoing, arrogant insistence on continuing such surveillance of private citizens—including Quakers, environmental groups and other clearly non-terrorist political opponents—are clear and egregious violations of our laws and of his constitutional authority.

Furthermore, I would suggest that both Democratic and Republican leaders, who apparently were apprised on multiple occasions of this ongoing illegal activity and who took no action to prevent it, may well have engaged in a criminal conspiracy against the American people.

--Mark Greene, our Aug. 2004 guest speaker, in ltr. to FWST

Senator Arlen Specter, Chairman of the Judicial Committee, has promised to hold hearings in early 2006 regarding the legality of the administration's spying on domestic individuals and organizations. How far can this administration stretch constitutional authority in its pursuit of a phantom victory over terrorism?

Will the Congress again cave in to presidential presumption? Stay tuned.

AFTER TOOKIE: THE WRONG DECISION IN CALIFORNIA

What purpose did his death serve, other than retribution? Mr. Williams was surely doing more to prevent crime outside prison and encourage rehabilitation inside it while he lived. And there is also that tiny bit of doubt about his conviction.

Ever when it is carefully administered, America's machinery of death still seems cruel and unusual. The United States is not the only democracy to retain the death penalty: Taiwan, Japan and India also do. But the number of executions it carries out puts it closer to China, Iran and Vietnam.

...Yet the row about Mr. Williams also shows that America may be changing its mind. After steadily rising to a rate of 98 a year in 1999, the number of executions has fallen—to 59 in 2004 and probably about the same in 2005, according to Death Penalty Information Center. Of the 38 states that retain the death penalty, 16 have not used it in the past two years. Public opinion has also been swayed by the publicity given to miscarriages of justice, especially in the light of DNA testing. Two years ago, Illinois's Republican governor commuted the sentences of 167 people on the state's death row.

Most Americans still support the death penalty, but the figure has fallen from 80% in 1994 to just 64% in a Gallup poll in October. The proportion falls further if the alternative is life in prison without parole, which is now an option in virtually all the death-penalty states. That has also helped the most encouraging trend of all: the number of death penalty sentences has dived from around 300 a year a decade or so ago to fewer than 100 this year—the lowest level in three decades. (Economist editorial)

MANY AMERICAN YOUTHS SERVING LIFE SENTENCES: International human rights advocates say the U.S. must stop giving young offenders life sentences without the chance of parole. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, at least 2,225 young offenders are serving such sentences in the U.S. compared to no more than *twelve* in the rest of the world. Life without parole for youths is outlawed in many countries by international law under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The U.S. and Somalia are the only two nations that haven't ratified the treaty. Somalia doesn't have a government to ratify anything. (The Humanist)

KOREAN FRAUD COULD IMPACT SUPPORT FOR U.S. STEM CELL RESEARCH: Many researchers say they are worried about the political impact of the stem-cell debacle in South Korea on U.S. public attitudes. The Senate is poised to consider several bills that could either boost or restrict stem-cell research. Although controversial because it involves the destruction of human embryos, the science has had generally high approval ratings with the public because of all the medical promise the cells are thought to hold. (WP)

JUDGE UPHOLDS PRAYER LIMITS IN INDIANA STATE HOUSE: U.S. District Judge David F. Hamilton ruled on Dec. 28 that the Indiana State House appeals too often to Jesus Christ and a Christian god. The “systematically sectarian” prayers, he concluded, are barred by the Constitution, which forbids the government to show preference for any religious denomination. He ordered the House to avoid mentioning Christ in the formal benedictions.

As the House prepared to open its 2006 session on January 4, a number of politicians have vowed to defy Hamilton, whom they accuse of undermining a 188-year Indiana tradition and interfering in legislative branch affairs. Hamilton expects House leaders, including Speaker Brian Bosma (R), who is appealing the decision to the Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit in Chicago, to honor the injunction. If they do not, the judge said, he intends “to take appropriate steps to insure compliance.” (WP)

ARCHBISHOP’S VERACITY QUESTIONED IN SEX SCANDAL: Attorneys for alleged victims of sex abuses asked a federal judge to let them question a top-ranking Vatican official about a church doctrine that might allow him to lie under oath. Archbishop William J. Levada, the South Franciscan prelate who earlier this year became the Vatican’s guardian of doctrinal orthodoxy, has agreed to be questioned during a January 9 deposition about his tenure as archbishop of Portland from 1986-1995. The Catholic Church teaches it is a sin to lie, but the doctrine of mental reservation allows for circumstances where it may be better to avoid the truth to serve a higher purpose. [How is one to know that the January 9 deposition is not such an occasion?] (WP)

TEXAS IMPROVES HEALTH COVERAGE FOR CHILDREN: Texas, which has one of the nation’s highest rates of uninsured children, took steps in 2005 to stop a decline in the number of children with health coverage. The state eliminated premiums for the poorest families enrolled in state health care programs and stopped cutting off families with higher incomes that failed to keep up premium payments.

As of the beginning of 2005, 16 percent of all Americans lacked health insurance but only 12 percent of children under 18 went uncovered, although that still amounts to nine million children, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. (NYT)

THE TIPPING POINT: The Earth’s climate is nearing, but has not passed, a tipping point beyond which it will be impossible to avoid climate change with far-ranging undesirable consequences. These include not only the loss of the Arctic as we know it, with all that implies for wildlife and indigenous peoples, but losses on a much vaster scale due to rising seas.

Ocean levels will increase slowly at first, as losses at the fringes of Greenland and Antarctica due to accelerating ice streams are nearly balanced by increased snowfall and ice sheet thickening in the ice sheet interiors.

But as Greenland and West Antarctic ice is softened and lubricated by meltwater, and as buttressing ice shelves disappear because of a warming ocean, the balance will tip toward the rapid disintegration of ice sheets.

The Earth's history suggest that with warming of two to three degrees the new sea level will include not only most of the ice from Greenland and West Antarctica, but a portion of East Antarctica, raising the sea level by twenty-five meters or eighty feet. Within a century coastal dwellers will be faced with irregular flooding associated with storms. They will have to continually rebuild above a transient water level.

This grim scenario can be halted if the growth of greenhouse gas emission is slowed in the first quarter of this century. [But not under the current White House occupant's reign: "We will not do anything that harms our economy" was Bush's excuse for rejecting the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The administration only barely budged at the recent global warming talks in Montreal on its opposition to any mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions.]

--James Hansen, former NASA scientist, in address to the American Geophysical Union

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT BLOCKS SCHOOL VOUCHERS: In a ruling expected to reverberate through battles over school choice in many states, the Florida Supreme Court struck down a voucher provision January 5 for students attending failing schools, saying the state constitution bars Florida from using tax money to finance a private alternative to the public system.

The 5-2 ruling orders state officials to end, at the end of this school year, a program that Governor Jeb Bush has considered one of his chief achievements. In its ruling the Florida court cited an article in the state constitution that says, "adequate provision shall be made by law for a uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools." The Opportunity School Program "violates this language," the court said. Gov. Bush has vowed to fight the decision both judicially and in the political arena. (NYT)

U.S. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM DIVIDING SOCIETY INTO HAVES AND HAVE-NOTS

The U.S. educational system as a whole has failed. Unless you are comfortably middle class or richer, you get an education that is truly second-rate by any standards. Apart from issues of fairness, what this means is that you never really access the talent of the poor, bright kids. They don't go to good schools and, because of teaching methods that focus on bringing everyone along, the bright ones are never pushed. In Singapore we get the poor kid who is very bright and very hungry, and that's crucial to our success. [Singapore typically ranks first, or close to first, in science and mathematics training of secondary and primary students.] From where I sit, it's not a flat world. It's one of peaks and valleys. The good news for America is that the peaks are getting higher. But the valleys are getting deeper, and many of them are also in the United States.

--Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Singapore's Minister of Education