

HUMANISTS

of FORT WORTH

Volume 13, Number 6 Happy

Humanist

July 2012

This newsletter is presented by the Humanists of Fort Worth (HoFW), Texas for its members.



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The Humanists of Fort Worth (HoFW) meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM at the Westside Unitarian Universalist Building, 901 Page Ave.

Meeting

July 11, 2012 7:00 PM

Speaker: Zachary Moore, PhD., President of DFW Coalition of Reason (DFWCoR).

Topic: "DFWCoR Member Profile: "Who We are and What We Want."

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THE AFFIRMATIONS OF HUMANISM: A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES *



WE ARE COMMITTED to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.

WE DEPLORE efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.

WE BELIEVE that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of life.

WE BELIEVE in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.

WE ARE COMMITTED to the principle of separation of church and state.

WE CULTIVATE the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.

WE ARE CONCERNED with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.

WE BELIEVE in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.

WE ATTEMPT to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.

WE WANT TO PROTECT and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.

WE BELIEVE in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.

WE BELIEVE in the cultivation of moral excellence.

WE RESPECT the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.

WE BELIEVE in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.

WE ARE ENGAGED by the arts no less than by the sciences.

WE ARE CITIZENS of the universe and are excited by the discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.

WE ARE SKEPTICAL of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.

WE AFFIRM HUMANISM as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.

WE BELIEVE in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.

WE BELIEVE in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.

* by PAUL KURTZ

. . from the Chair: **Sam Baker**

The "A" Word

The word atheist conjures up a lot of negative feelings and emotions among the majority of our fellow citizens. Since they have been taught that the Bible is the wellspring of all morality, I think they presume that anyone who has rejected the existence of the supernatural being who allegedly gave us (or inspired) the Bible has also rejected morality. I struggled with the term myself when I was young. For many years I referred to myself as an agnostic because it seems to be more socially acceptable to be an agnostic than an atheist. Even now I prefer the term naturalist, although I wholly embrace the A word as well.

Someone familiar with the HOFW was heard to say that he (or she) was concerned that there were more atheists in the in the HOFW than he realized (what did he expect?), and he felt uncomfortable. Uncomfortable? Funny, that's the way I feel around religious people. I am a bit fearful of people who blindly accept dogma, especially when it plainly contradicts scientific fact and justifies prejudice and injustice. Beyond that, I am just plain uncomfortable around people who believe patently crazy things.

I am uncomfortable around people who believe in a supernatural creator who would prescribe the death penalty for eating shellfish, working on the Sabbath and for wearing cloth of mixed fibers (Leviticus, for those few of you who don't know) and in a creator who is as flawed as the most disturbed human among us. No more honest assessment of the god of the Old Testament has been made than that of Richard Dawkins:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, blood-thirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

And I am really uncomfortable with a presidential candidate who believes that the Garden of Eden was in Missouri, that American Indians are the descendants of an ancient tribe of Jews, and that god was a flesh and blood man living on or near some planet called Kolob.

Is there no limit to the crazy things people will believe?

There is a glimmer of hope for the future. According to a recently released poll conducted by the Pew Research Center young people are abandoning superstition and the supernatural in significant numbers. The number of Millennials (those born in 1981 or later) who say they never doubt the existence of God has declined 15 points since 2007 (unfortunately, the number of older Americans who never doubt the existence of God remains stable). If this rate of decline continues, nonbelievers will someday be in the majority.

So who are these atheists and what do they want? At our next meeting, Dr. Zachary Moore, Coordinator of the DFW Coalition of Reason ("DFW CoR"), will tell us by analyzing the results of a poll he conducted last year of members of groups comprising the DFW CoR (a poll in which hopefully you participated). It should be a fascinating presentation, and I hope to see you there.

From Free Mind: A publication of the American Humanist Association, Summer 2012

AHA Works With Rep. Pete Stark to Issue National Day of Reason Proclamation

The American Humanist Association is pleased that United States Representative Pete Stark (D-CA) has officially recognized the National Day of Reason by issuing a proclamation in the House of Representatives. The National day of Reason, observed on May 3, is an alternative to the National Day of Prayer.

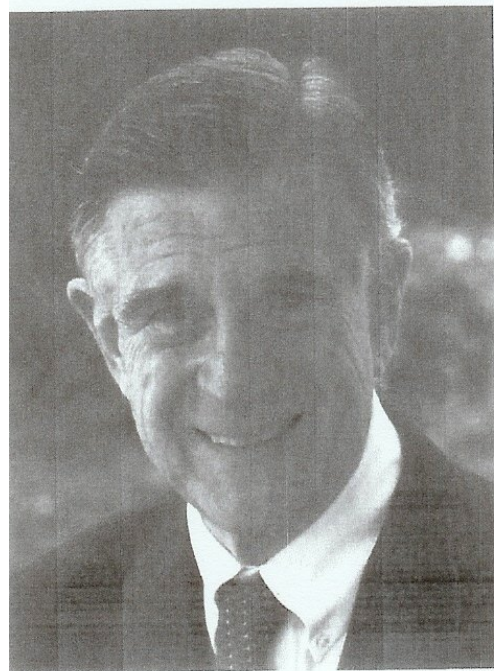
AHA's Legislative Staffer, Matthew Bulger, lobbied Representative Stark's office to issue the proclamation in April after Representative Stark appeared at this year's Reason Rally. The Proclamation states in part, "Our nation faces many problems—bringing our troops home from Afghanistan, creating jobs, educating our children, and protecting our safety net from irresponsible cuts. We will solve these issues through the application of reason. We must also protect women's reproductive choices, the integrity of scientific research, and our public education system from those who would hide behind religious dogma to undermine them."

"Reason should be the guiding force for public policy," said Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director of the American Humanist Association. "The National Day of Prayer excludes millions of Americans who choose not to pray or prefer keeping prayer private. Reason is something that everyone can celebrate."

Lauren Anderson Youngblood, communications manager for the Secular Coalition for America agreed. "Our founders recognized that the best guarantee of freedom for all was a separation of religion and government," Youngblood said. "The National Day of Reason reminds us of the continued importance of our nation's founding principles and offers an alternative to the government sponsored theism that the National Day of Prayer represents."

The event is scheduled on the first Thursday in May each year to coincide with the National Day of Prayer in order to raise awareness of the threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship. Many local groups affiliated with the American Humanist Association observe the National Day of Reason by participating in blood drives, holding rallies outside state government buildings or hosting social gatherings.

The National Day of Reason website, NationalDayofReason.org, was established by the American Humanist Association and the Washington Area Secular Humanists.



Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA)

Humanists of Fort Worth

Minutes

June 13, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chair Sam Baker. There were 32 members, including two new members, and three visitors in attendance.

Minutes of the May 2012 meeting were read by the Secretary and approved.

Treasurer Dolores Ruhs gave the Treasurer's Report, which was approved.

This month founding member and past Chair Dick Trice spoke on "Four Freethinkers All Humanists Should Know About: Clarence Darrow, Denis Diderot, H. L. Mencken, and Emma Goldman".

After a short break for refreshments, there was a Q. and A. session.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Fisher, Secretary

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

Single Member	\$25.00/yr.
Couple	\$40.00/yr
Patron	\$50.00/yr.
Student	\$10.00/yr.

Choose the category that best fits your needs.

See the Treasurer or member of the Board for an application.

Pay in cash or mail the application, with your check, to our Treasurer, Dolores Ruhs.

Humanists of Ft. Worth (HoFW)

Treasurer's Report

Report Date: 13-Jun-2012

Beginning Date: 12-Apr-2012

Beginning Balance 14-Mar-2012 **\$1,364.73**

CREDITS		Date	Amount
Dues collected			330.00
Donation			5.32
Snacks			
TOTAL CREDITS			<u>\$335.32</u>

DEBITS	Activity	Ck. #	Date	Amount
Coffee Maker		479	4/16/2012	43.21
Coffee Supplies		480	4/23/2012	18.92
Westside UU	Donation	481	5/1/2012	300.00
TOTAL DEBITS				<u>\$362.13</u>

-\$26.81

Ending Balance 13-Jun-12 **\$1,337.92**

Attest:

Signature:

Date: 13-Jun-2012

 Dolores M. Ruhs Treasurer
 Don Ruhs Clerk

Copies:

- Sam Baker Chair
- Gene Gwin Co-Chair
- John Fisher Rec. Secy.
- Dolores Ruhs Treasurer
- Don Ruhs Board Member
- Dick Trice Board Member

HUMANISM AND THE HIERARCHY OF ABILITY

Submitted by John Fisher, HoFW Secretary

"We believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves."

-- "Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles", by Paul Kurtz

It sounds goodhearted and high-minded as a humanist affirmation; at the same time, the first nine of those words appear to invite a dichotomy. We believe that no one should be cast aside by society or its government and left to fend for themselves under disadvantageous conditions, or physical or developmental disability. At the same time, there is an undeniable, inescapable hierarchy of ability in human society.

It is the more able among us who develop advanced skills, who advance scientific knowledge, who push boundaries and break records, who make the new discoveries that save lives and improve quality of living, who start up new businesses that fill real needs, who engage the political system, run for public office, and make significant contributions toward the social and economic progress humanists so highly value. The ability differential across society may seem unfairly predicated on factors beyond individual control; but the development of abilities that move knowledge and progress forward is highly and justly rewarded. High achievers attain a level near the top of society; while those of lesser ability settle toward the bottom, where (in the opinion of many observers) they belong.

We as humanists can believe passionately in democratic principles and the equal state of all human beings, but this does not alter the hierarchy of society conditioned upon achievement and its deserving. In its absence, progress would cease. Under its rubric, all of humanity moves forward - accompanied by the occasional frauds and cults of personality that mark our mass media age. These would appear to be part of the price of progress among sometimes flawed human beings.

Personal experience teaches that dependence on

public assistance, while truly helpful on one level, can lead to a loss of direction and shriveling of initiative, and open the door to hazards of various description. But whether this pitfall is avoided altogether, or one is lucky enough to find real help and thus exit the zone of immediate danger, a vital task looms, in two phases: discover the true and worthy personal passions, and follow that up with the linking of passions to abilities one does have.

" . . . so that they will be able to help themselves."

Paternalism and intent to indoctrinate are visible *miles* in advance by many persons with challenges, and for them, programs alloyed with those motives have not worked. The effective solution is one individual taking personal responsibility, and persevering: to move beyond fear, to challenge one's own acquired mental/cultural self-limitations, to educate oneself, to reach out, to risk, to work, to try, to dare - *to make oneself able*.

How can we as humanists encourage the taking of self-responsibility amid adverse conditions in the environment or in oneself? The small signs of acceptance *as one is* go a long way - that a person is considered a full member of the community is immediately evident. The little things: help with a service animal, slowing one's pace for someone who might walk just a bit slower - these are all things we automatically do for persons we consider friends. We are very fortunate to be members of a community in which all of these ways of acceptance are abundantly apparent every day.

Beyond this, the responsibility to develop personal potential rests with the individual.

Editorial—Don Ruhs . . .
 . . . **who wrote the bible?**

A question was asked at our June meeting about the authorship of the Judeo-Christian Bible. Dick Trice answered that no one really knows who the writers were. That, as far as I am able to determine, after almost six decades of reading and studying The Holy Bible, is the truth and, the real truth, of its origin.

There have been many historians throughout the ages who've made in-depth studies of the Bible and its origins; most of them, except for the bible literalists, have come to the conclusion that this book, or collection of books, came about thru word of mouth over several centuries. And, because it was orally transmitted, any number of translations of similar events, or similar quotations, could have made their way into those pages.

Today's scientists have shown what can happen when a sentence or phrase is passed along orally from person to person. The end result is that, usually, when the phrase is ultimately repeated by the last person in the study group, it's quite different from the original.

The scientists also suspect that when the scribes were given the responsibility to copy the words into manuscripts they sometimes took it upon themselves to include their personal interpretations as to what the writings *should* mean.

Ultimately, the Bible detectives have determined that the writings and "fantastic" tales were merely mythologies and/or superstitions passed along from many other sources. Some of the supposed "authors" of the books of the Bible had died decades before those books and writings that were attributed to them found their way into print.

Here is a list of some of the several books in my personal library dealing with the historicity of

that "Holiest of Holy" books. I highly recommend these if you are truly interested in learning more.

"The Jefferson Bible" by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). Publ. by Beacon Press (Unitarian). The former president was reluctant to have this book published during his lifetime. The introduction in my copy was done by Forrest Church, senior minister of All Souls Church (Unitarian) in New York City.

"Deceptions and Myths of the Bible" Lloyd M. Graham, 1979.

"The Bible as History" by Werner Keller (1909-) 2nd Revised Edition, 1980
 Archaeology & Science delve 4,000 years into the past.

"Hebrew Myths—The book of genesis"
 Robert Graves & Raphael Patai, 1983

"What the Bible Really Says" Manfred Barthel, 1984.

"Asimov's Guide to the Bible" Isaac Asimov 1981.

"Who Wrote the Bible?" Richard E. Friedman, 1987.

"Forged" Bart D. Ehrman, 2011.

"Misquoting Jesus" (The story behind who changed the Bible and why). Bart D. Ehrman, 2005.

"Lost Christianities" (The battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew). Bart D. Ehrman, 2003.

Don Ruhs, Editor

Contemporary Books with UU/Humanist Affiliation

Submitted by
Reed Bilz, Member HoFW

Ahab's Wife or The Star Gazer by Sena Jeter Nasland. Fictional account of the Captain from Moby Dick who was a Unitarian and knew Margaret Fuller.

Here if You Need Me by Kate Braestrup, memoir by a UU Minister who works for the Forest Service.

American Bloomsbury by Susan Cheever. Historical accounts of the lives of the Concord Transcendentalists (Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, Hawthorne, etc.)

The Glory Cloak by Patricia O'Brien. Fictional account of Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton nursing during the Civil War.

March by Geraldine Brooks. Fictional account of Louisa May Alcott's (Jo March's) father fighting in the Civil War when he was absent in Little Women. This one won a Pulitzer.

Patriot Hearts by Barbara Hambley. The lives of Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, Dolly Madison and Sally Hemmings. This book is fictionalized but based on facts.

The Lives of Margaret Fuller: A Biography by John Matteson. Published January 2012, the book has received good reviews.

Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father. This is a dual biography showing how their lives affected each other.

The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism by Megan Marshall. The biographical account of three sisters' lives intertwined with Emerson, Horace Mann and Hawthorne.



Church

&

STATE



the BOOK NOOK

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States—"The Establishment Clause."

From: Americans United for the Separation of Church & State June 2012, page 16

Fifty years ago this month, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a pivotal decision dealing with religious liberty, public schools and parental rights.

In *Engel v. Vitale*, the high court held that government officials had no right to compose prayers and pressure children to recite them in public schools. It was the first time a federal court had ruled directly on the issue of school prayer.

In this June 25 ruling, the Supreme Court did not "kick prayer out of schools," as some complain. Students retain the right to pray on their own if they choose. The high court simply stopped school officials from coercing students to take part in religious exercises against their will.

Nor was official worship in public schools as widespread as some believe. A 1960 survey by Americans United found that only five states had laws on the books mandating daily Bible reading. Another 25 had laws allowing "optional" scripture readings. Courts in 11 states struck the practice down as unconstitutional.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the *Engel* ruling, we salute all those involved, including the attorneys who successfully argued the case and especially the brave parents and their children who had the vision to see it through.

This space is intended to focus attention on books, authors, subjects and articles that may be of interest to humanists, agnostics, atheists, and freethinkers.

While the below listed books were not necessarily written by humanists nor freethinkers, the contents themselves seem to favor our interests about our Universe: Including our Solar System; the Earth and the creatures that inhabit it; and the many inventions and innovations *we've been able to create and improvise.*

"Everything You Need to Know About Everything You Need to Know About—Your World, and everything around it, in a nutshell."

By Daniel Tatarsky
© Anova Books Co., Ltd. 2011

"Everything You Need to Know About Everything You Need to Know About—The Universe. From the big bang to the big crunch in a nutshell."

By Chris Cooper
© Anova Books Co., Ltd. 2011

"Everything You Need to Know About Everything You Need to Know About—Inventions."

By Michael Heatley and Colin Salter
© Anova Books Co., Ltd. 2011

NOTE:

Tatarsky gives a brief reference to "How the universe was created—*according to the world's six leading religions.*" The remainder of the book deals with scientific aspects.