



The Ft Worth Humanists meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 7 PM. The gathering site is the Unitarian/Universalist Building 901 Page Ave. Prior to the meeting, several of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria, 2800 8th Ave. at 5:30 P M. All are welcome to join us!

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Dick, my wife, Audrey, and I were in attendance at a talk given by Dr. Ellery Schempp. The event was hosted by the UTA Freethinkers.

Dr Schempp was the plaintiff in the landmark case in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public schools were in violation of The Constitution, when permitting or mandating students to pray in class.

Dr Schempp is the subject of the book 'Ellery's Protest' written by Stephen Solomon, in which the author wrote of the tribulations of Dr Schempp during his high school tenure.

Robert O'Neil, Professor of Law, University of Virginia:

"Stephen Solomon's 'Ellery's Protest' provides a brilliant analysis of a major Supreme Court decision that redefined the relationship between church and state almost a half-century ago.

This study goes well beyond simply offering a gripping account of the course of litigation that brought before the Justices the contentious issue of prayer and Bible reading in public schools, though the thoroughness of that account would merit careful reading by itself. Especially impressive is the author's deep probing of hitherto neglected sources.

For more about Schempp go to:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellery_Schempp

A gentle reminder to our members from our prez:

It's time for us to submit our annual dues!

Penn Jillette expresses his view on religion

Jillette is the loud half of Penn & Teller - They perform their irreverent magic act regularly in Las Vegas. Both are very outspoken about being atheists and skeptics and use it as part of the act. --- Penn Jillette wrote a now famous piece entitled "There is no God" in which he explained his position in taking atheism a step further and actually believing in no god. The original was first published with NPR. NPR's Morning Edition featured Penn in an ongoing series titled "This I Believe," based on a similar series from the 1950s. The rules required that the essayist state their position in the affirmative. Jillette did so cleverly by saying "I believe there is no God."

Here are some excerpts:

Morning Edition, November 21, 2005 · I believe that there is no God. I'm beyond atheism. Atheism is not believing in God. Not believing in God is easy -- you can't prove a negative, so there's no work to do. You can't prove that there isn't an elephant inside the trunk of my car. You sure? How about now? Maybe he was just hiding before. Check again. Did I mention that my personal heartfelt definition of the word "elephant" includes mystery, order, goodness, love and a spare tire?

But, this "This I Believe" thing seems to demand something more personal, some leap of faith that helps one see life's big picture, some rules to live by. So, I'm saying, "This I believe: I believe there is no God."

Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I'm not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, (continued on Page 2)

but it's everything in the world and everything in the world is plenty for me. It seems just rude to beg the invisible for more. Just the love of my family that raised me and the family I'm raising now is enough that I don't need heaven. I won the huge genetic lottery and I get joy every day.

Believing there's no God means I can't really be forgiven except by kindness and faulty memories. That's good; it makes me want to be more thoughtful. I have to try to treat people right the first time around.

Believing there is no God means the suffering I've seen in my family, and indeed all the suffering in the world, isn't caused by an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent force that isn't bothered to help or is just testing us, but rather something we all may be able to help others with in the future.

No God means the possibility of less suffering in the future.

But, this "This I Believe" thing seems to demand something more personal, some leap of faith that helps one see life's big picture, some rules to live by. So, I'm saying, "This I believe: I believe there is no God."

Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I'm not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough.

Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.

Penn's podcasts may be found on:
<http://www.pennfans.net/>

Posted on Sun, Feb. 17, 2008

Our reputation for flakiness is at stake

By CARL HIAASEN

In a move that could endanger Florida's flaky backwater reputation, the state Board of Education is poised to endorse the teaching of evolution as a science.

This is a dangerous idea -- not the presentation of Darwinism in schools, but the presentation of Florida as a place of progressive scientific thought.

Over the years the Legislature has worked tirelessly to keep our kids academically stuck in the mid-1950s. This has been achieved by overcrowding their classrooms, underpaying their teachers and letting their school buildings fall apart. Florida's plucky refusal to embrace 21st century education is one reason that prestigious tech industries have avoided the state, allowing so many of our high-school graduates (and those who come close) to launch prosperous careers in the fast-food, bartending and service sectors of the economy.

By accepting evolution as a proven science, our top educators would be sending a loud message to the rest of the nation: Stop making fun of us.

Is that what we really want? On Tuesday, the Board of Education is scheduled to vote on a proposed set of new standards that describe evolution as the "fundamental concept underlying all of biology" and "supported by multiple forms of scientific evidence."

Certainly that's the position of every reputable academic group on the planet, including the National Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Science Teachers Association.

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But forget the fossil record, OK? Forget DNA tracing. Forget the exhaustively documented diversification of species.

This battle is about pride and independence; about boldly going against the flow, in defiance of reason and all known facts. In recent weeks, the Board of Education has been swamped by e-mails and letters from religious conservatives who advocate teaching creationism or intelligent design, and who believe evolution should be discussed strictly as a "theory."

For those who wish to see Florida standing still, if not sinking, this is a fantastic strategy. In fact, it could be expanded to revise other educational doctrines.

Let's start teaching gravity as a "theory," too. And don't forget the solar system -- what proof do we really have, besides a bunch of fuzzy, fake-looking photos, that Mars really exists? At a recent public hearing in Orlando, opponents of evolutionary teaching rose one by one to assail the proposed curriculum standards.

Some had traveled all the way from the Panhandle, and were, like presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, exclusive believers in the Bible's version of creation.

According to The St. Petersburg Times, one speaker compared Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary science, to Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, well-known tyrants and mass murderers. Such loony gibberish is actually good for the anti-evolution crusade, providing the best evidence that the human species has not advanced one iota in the last 100,000 years.

With this in mind, several school boards in North Florida have passed resolutions opposing the teaching of evolution as fact. True, students in those same districts have produced some of the worst science scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, but who needs Newton or Copernicus when you've got the Corinthians?

The notion that humans descended from apes has never been popular among fundamentalists, but what of the apes themselves? Given the gory history of *Homo sapiens* on Earth, no self-respecting chimp or gorilla would claim a genetic connection to us.

The outcry against evolutionary instruction has been so heated that 40 members of the committee responsible for the new science standards felt compelled to sign a letter stating, "There is no longer any valid scientific criticism of the theory of evolution." Caving in to groups that question the

soundness of science, the letter warned, "would not only seriously impede the education of our children but also create the image of a backward state, raising the risk of Florida's being snubbed by biotechnology companies and other science-based businesses."

Nice try, pinheads, but there's no sin in being a slightly backward state with extremely modest expectations for its young people. That's been the guiding philosophy of our tightwad lawmakers for years, and the degree to which they've succeeded is illuminated annually in the FCAT charade.

If snubbing is to be done, Florida should be the snubber, not the snubee. Keep your elite biotech payrolls up North and out West -- we've got hundreds of thousands of low-paying, go-nowhere jobs that require little training and minimal education.

Should state officials vote this week to put evolution on the teaching agenda, it will be a small yet radical step out of Florida's backward-thinking past. Resistance is not futile. We've worked hard to

keep ourselves so far behind in education, and we must stay the course.

When God and the Law Don't Square

By Adam Liptak N Y Times

February 17, 2008 A PRETTY good way to generate an outcry, as the archbishop of Canterbury learned in Britain recently, is to say that a Western legal system should make room for Shariah, or Islamic law. When the archbishop, spiritual leader of the world's 80 million Anglicans, commented in a radio interview that such an accommodation was "unavoidable," critics conjured images of stonings and maimings, overwhelming his more modest point.

The archbishop, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams, did not propose importing Shariah into the criminal law and was referring mostly to divorces in which both sides have agreed to abide by the judgment of a religious tribunal. His proposal was groundbreaking only in extending to Islamic tribunals in Britain a role that Jewish and Christian ones have long played in the judicial systems of secular societies. Courts in the United States have endorsed all three kinds of tribunals.

In 2003, for instance, a Texas appeals court referred a divorce case to a local tribunal called the Texas Islamic Court. In 2005, the federal appeals court in New Orleans affirmed an award in an employment arbitration by the Institute for Christian Conciliation, which uses Biblical teachings to settle disputes. And state courts routinely enforce the decisions made by a Jewish court, known as a *bet din*, in commercial and family law cases.

The outcry in Britain was apparently something of a visceral reaction to aspects of Islamic law, though the archbishop himself condemned what he called the inhumanity of "extreme punishments" and some Islamic countries' "attitudes toward women."

The larger question, legal experts in the United States said, is whether government courts should ever defer to religious ones. The answer may depend on whether the people involved authentically consented to religious adjudication, whether they are allowed to change their minds and whether the decisions of those tribunals are offensive to fundamental conceptions of justice.

A Christian Nation?

By Carol V. Hamilton

Ms. Hamilton has a Ph.D. in English from Berkeley. Her website: <http://www.carolvanderveerhamilton.com>.

The January 28, 2008 issue of the *Nation* featured a disturbing article entitled "Christianizing U.S. History." Its author, Chris Hedges, reported on the latest maneuvers to (mis)represent the Founders—even the skeptical, unorthodox Jefferson!—as conventional, even evangelical, Christians. Political campaigns include similar rhetoric. Mike Huckabee has been running for president as "a Christian leader." And John McCain has joined the many evangelicals who believe that the Founders intended for the United States to be "a Christian nation."

Although he must have attended law school, Judge Roy Moore, who wanted to post the Ten Commandments in his courtroom, confused our complex legal system with a rather simple moral code. He seemed to know nothing of Anglo-Saxon law, with all its attention to property rights and other matters that lie outside the realm of morality. Yale Law School has an interesting site on the subject.

I went to high school in the state where Judge Moore made national news. When I took Civics, I was not introduced to John Locke, Roger Williams, the Federalist Papers, the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, or the Bill of Rights. Instead, our class was assigned to read issues of *U.S. News & World Report* -- *Time* having been discontinued as "too liberal." What I mainly remember about the class is that our teacher would say to the boys, "You are cruising for a bruising."

Ignorance of science and of intellectual history is endemic in this country, but it is exacerbated by home-schooling and religious schools, with their "Christ-centered" curricula.

The Christian-nation myth can be debunked by a little reading of original texts.

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In one of his letters Benjamin Franklin tells how he found the Calvinism in which he had been raised incomprehensible, so he abandoned it. He tried another church, was unimpressed by the sermon, and decided to spend his future Sundays reading at home. Franklin was not an atheist; he believed in a God and in an afterlife in which evil would be punished and good rewarded. He expressed some doubts about the divinity of Jesus, but said he was agnostic on the subject. And of course, unlike our evangelicals, Franklin was fascinated by science.

Jefferson, who belonged to a younger generation, was not an atheist either, but he took a harder line than Franklin. Famously, he did disbelieve in the divinity of Jesus, making his own version of the New Testament. He wrote a friend of his “creed of materialism,” dismissing all notions of miracles, angels, and other supernatural beings. On the subject of religious orthodoxy. Jefferson’s letters are often scathing. To a Mrs. Samuel Smith, he wrote on August 6, 1816:

I never attempted to make a convert, nor wished to change another's creed. I have ever judged of the religion of others by their lives ... for it is in our lives, and not from our words, that our religion must be read. But this does not satisfy the priesthood. They must have a positive, a declared assent to all their interested absurdities. My opinion is that there would never have been an infidel, if there had never been a priest

Like Franklin, Jefferson rejected Calvinism. On November 2, 1822, he wrote, “The blasphemy and absurdity of the five points of Calvin, and the impossibility of defending them, render their advocates impatient of reasoning, irritable, and prone to denunciation.” He complained that Presbyterians were meddling troublemakers, and stated that he looked forward to the day when all Americans would be Unitarians.

In a burst of eloquence, he wrote to Joseph Priestly in 1802:

The Gothic idea that we are to look backwards instead of forwards for the improvement of the human mind, and to recur to the annals of our ancestors for what is most perfect in government, in religion and in learning, is worthy of those bigots in religion & government, by whom it has been recommended, & whose purposes it would answer. But it is not an idea which this country will endure.

In 1819, James Madison expounded on religion in a piece entitled “Monopolies, Perpetuities, Corporations, Ecclesiastical Endowments.” In it Madison praises Virginia’s 1786 statute of religious liberty, written by Thomas Jefferson. “This act is a true standard of Religious liberty: its principle the great barrier against usurpation on the right of conscience.” In his reference to “conscience,” Madison is echoing John Locke, arguably the thinker who exercised the most profound influence upon our Founders.

Madison proceeds to remind his readers of “the danger of a direct mixture of Religion & civil Government.” He launches into a long argument against congressional chaplains. If their salaries were paid by the federal government, congressional chaplains would constitute “a palpable violation of equal rights, as well as of Constitutional principles.” If members of Congress want chaplains, Madison writes, they should pay for them out of their own pockets.

Alluding to the long-standing theological differences between Christian sects, Madison asks rhetorically, “Could a Catholic clergyman ever hope to be appointed chaplain? To say that his religious principles are obnoxious, or that his sect is small, is to lift the evil at once and exhibit in its naked deformity the doctrine that religious truth is to be tested by numbers, or that the major sects have a right to govern the minor .”

The complete article appears here:

<http://hnn.us/articles/47323.html>

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