



May

2011

**The Humanists of Ft Worth meet at the Westside Unitarian building on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7 PM**



## From The Chair

### ANNUAL ELECTION AND FOLLOW UP TO THE APRIL BLOWOUT

Wow. One hundred eleven came to see and hear Tom Flynn of the Council for Secular Humanism at our April meeting and five new members signed up. I wish all of you much satisfaction and enjoyment in your connection with

HOFW. In addition, I've added 41 names of visitors whose email addresses were legible and I sincerely hope you get this message and come again soon.

May is the month we elect officers for the following year beginning with the June meeting. The offices are Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Please be thinking of persons you would like to see in these positions and give serious consideration to serving in one yourself.

With the considerable number of newer members and visitors in the last several months I think this May program is an appropriate time to talk about the subject of humanism and humanists, allowing lots of time for questions and comments, *especially an opportunity for the newer members*. I plan to say something about some great freethinkers who are not as famous as many others but should be better known for all they have contributed toward greater humanism in the world.

We'll have coffee and sweets as usual, a very brief business meeting and close at our usual time of 8:30. I hope many of you come and add your influence toward making humanism a stronger and more vital force in our surrounding sea of stale, servile supernaturalism.

Your participation is important! See you Wednesday, May 11, 7 P.M.!

Dick Trice

Last month's meeting was both informative and humorous. Mr. Tom Flynn, editor of Free Inquiry addressed over 100 members and visitors in attendance. To acquaint those who were not at the gathering, I am including his essay from the most recent Free Inquiry magazine

## One (National) Step Back, One (Local) Step Forward by Tom Flynn editor Free Inquiry April 2011

It is the worst of times, it is the best of times-sometimes Dickensian clichés seem inescapable, even if Dickens gets slightly mangled along the way. The closing months of 2010 brought us one of the more heartbreaking church-state losses in recent memory, one whose full ghastliness secularists may need a long-term historical perspective in order to comprehend fully. Those same months also brought an unexpected, indeed astonishing, leap forward in an area that I and others had largely given up hope of seeing genuinely radical reform. Unfortunately, the bad news on church and state was national in scope, while the good news concerns only a single state. But considering that the closing months of 2010 also brought us a midterm election that returned the political momentum to wanna-be theocrats, I'll take my good news wherever I can find it.

First, let's cover the bad news. On November 17, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to implement the reform recommendations of the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. To be sure, George W. Bush's dismal (and to my mind, transparently unconstitutional) faith-based initiative desperately needed reform. Obama's order corrected a few of its most egregious problems, but too many abusive provisions were left intact. As Center for Inquiry General Counsel Derek Araujo so capably summarized in the Secular Humanist Bulletin ("President Obama and the Faith-Based Initiative," SHB, Winter 2010/11), "the order requires federal agencies to provide secular alternatives for people who do not want to receive social services from religious charities. The order also encourages greater transparency by requiring recipient organizations to be disclosed on government websites." Two cheers. Unfortunately, the Obama reforms left several highly disturbing practices intact. As Araujo noted, "The order leaves in place the George W. Bush-era policy of allowing grant recipients to engage in religiously based employment discrimination, all on the taxpayer's dime." It also (paraphrasing Araujo) lets public funds continue going directly to houses of worship and lets publicly funded faith-based organizations continue proselytizing by displaying religious signage and scripture quotes in their social-service facilities. In this and numerous other ways, the executive order fell far short of reforming the faith-based initiative as church-state watchdogs had advocated. For example,

## **Texas Beer Joint Sues Church** From The Clark County (AL) Democrat

In a small Texas town, ( Mt. Vernon ) Drummond's bar began construction on a new building to increase it's business.. The local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and prayers. Work progressed right up till the week before opening when lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground.

The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, until the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect actions or means.

The church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection to the building's demise in its reply to the court.

As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork. At the hearing he commented, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but as it appears from the paperwork, we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that does not."

## **The United States Has Mexico....and Sweden Has Us** By David Mc Cray

**Who would have imagined that Sweden**—of all countries—with its heavily unionized workforce, its social programs, its liberated sexual attitudes, its minimum wage of \$18 per hour, and its 5 weeks of guaranteed paid vacation, would dare treat the United States the way....well, the way the United States treats Mexico?

Yet, bizarre as it sounds, that scenario is unfolding before our eyes. Based on what has occurred during the last three years at Ikea's Danville, Virginia, manufacturing plant, it is now evident that Sweden regards the U.S. as little more than an advanced Third World nation—a geographical area capable of providing a reliable pool of low-wage workers to assemble Ikea's furniture. They regard us the way we regard Mexico.

It was only three years ago that state and local officials offered the high-profile Swedish company \$12 million dollars in tax breaks and subsidies to lure it to Virginia. For a region as economically strapped and desperate as Danville was, signing up a big-time, respected manufacturer like Ikea was considered a monumental coup. It was a dream come true.

But that dream soon turned into a nightmare. Indeed, Ikea has transformed itself from savior to villain. The company has done things in Danville that it never, ever would have considered doing back home in Sweden, not only because those things would have spoiled the company's domestic image as an enlightened and munificent employer, but because, in fact, those things would've been violations of prevailing labor laws.

To put it bluntly, Ikea's Danville plant has turned into a grotesque, Scandinavian version of a modern day sweatshop. When the IAM (International Association of Machinists) made a run at unionizing the facility, Ikea went into a full-blown defensive posture, hiring the law firm of Jackson Lewis, an aggressive, anti-labor outfit that specializes in keeping unions out. Again, this putatively generous and worker-friendly company has stunned everyone—both in the U.S. and Sweden—by doing an imitation of Wal-Mart.

Without a union to protect the employees, Ikea has done all those things non-union shops typically do. They lowered the starting hourly wage from \$9.75 per hour to \$8.00 per hour (the federal minimum is \$7.25) , and began forcing people to work inordinate amounts of overtime. In fact, there is so much mandatory overtime being assigned—much of it on short notice—that people are actually quitting. Eight dollars an hour and never knowing when you're going home doesn't offer much incentive to stay.

In Sweden, Ikea employees are not only well-paid and well-benefited, but overtime is worked on a strictly voluntary basis. No Ikea employee in Sweden has to work over unless they want to. But in Danville, Virginia, it's a different story. The plant's 335 employees can only go home when they're permitted to. As for vacation, Ikea employees in Sweden get 5-weeks paid leave per year; in Danville, workers get 12 days—eight of them assigned by the company.

Moreover, several EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) racial discrimination lawsuits have already been filed by African American workers, charging that they were arbitrarily placed on less desirable jobs and assigned to less desirable shifts. And why wouldn't they be? Who's going to prevent that?

The Danville episode clearly illustrates two truths: First, without a built-in safety net (either in the form of a union or rigid labor laws—the kind the U.S. lacks) workers are going to be at the mercy of their employer. And second, Ikea's reputation as a noble, enlightened and magnanimous employer is pure bullshit. How do you say "exploitation" in Swedish?

## **Pope served with court papers in molestation case** April 13, 2011

It is official, the Pope and two top Vatican officials have been served with court papers associated with the Milwaukee-area school for the deaf molestation case in which 200 deaf children were alleged to have been molested by Reverend Lawrence C. Murphy between 1950 and 1974.

The plaintiff's lawyer, Jeff Anderson, confirmed yesterday (April 12th) that the lawsuit has been going through official channels and that the Vatican has received notice of the suit last week. The suit alleges that the Pope and two other top Vatican officials knew about the accusations of sexual molestation and called off investigations.

Even though Reverend Lawrence C. Murphy has since died, the case continues because of the allegation that the Vatican attempted to systematically cover-up the case. It could even be said that they have obstructed justice and put other children in harms way.

If this case is allowed to proceed, it will open up the door for similar cases throughout the world. Earlier this year, a Philadelphia Grand Jury revealed a similar sexual molestation scandal involving 37 priests of the Catholic Church.

## **God, We Need Atheists** By [Frank Fredericks](#) Founder of World Faith and Conar Records, Co-Founder Religious Freedom USA

The discourse between evangelical Christians and atheists has been antipodal at best. Whether it is Richard Dawkins calling faith "the great cop-out," or countless professed Christians using "godless" like an offensive epithet, we've reached new lows. In fact, generally the discussion quickly descends into a volley of talking points and apologetics. I abhor those conversations with the same disdain I reserve for being stuck in the crossfire between a toe-the-line Republican and slogan-happy Democrat, rehashing last week's pundit talking points.

I believe we need to revolutionize the way we interact. As an evangelical Christian, I recognize that my community equates atheism with pedophilia, like some dark spiritual vacuum that sucks out any trace of compassion or morality. Even in interfaith circles, where peace and tolerance (and soft kittens) rule the day, the atheists are often eyed with suspicion in the corner -- if they're even invited.

I thank God for atheists. During my college years at New York University, I had the superb opportunity to have powerful conversations with atheists who challenged me to have an honest conversation about faith. I appreciate and value how atheist friends of mine encouraged inquiry. Remarkably, while this may not have been their intent, it only strengthened my faith. While I was able to begin weeding out the empty talking points from the substantive discourse, I hope they also got a glimpse of the love of Christ from an evangelical who wasn't preaching damnation or waiting to find the next available segue into a three-fold pamphlet about how they need Jesus in their life. The point is, Christians need to stop seeing their atheist neighbors, co-workers, and even family members as morally lost, eternally damned, or a possible convert.

What lies at the bottom of this is the assumption, as pushed by many Christian leaders, that religious people have the monopoly on morality and values -- that, in a sense, you can't be good without God. This is troubling on several levels. While at first glance this seems theologically sound to assume the traditional concept of salvation, most haven't grappled with the problematic idea that Hitler could be in heaven and Gandhi could be in hell. That should be troubling for us. Also, the cultural and social ramifications of this leads to an antagonizing relationship. The Bible is littered with examples of non-religious, non-Christian, or non-Jewish people who do good in the eyes of God. It shouldn't be shocking to see atheists teach their children integrity, or volunteer in a soup kitchen.

While I reserve the bulk of my frustration for those misusing my own faith, atheists aren't blameless in this tectonic paradigm. Rather than taking the inclusive road of respectful disagreement, many of the largest voices for atheism find it more enjoyable to belittle faith, mock religion, and disregard their cultural and sociological value. In fact, many consider it their duty to evangelize their beliefs with the same judgmental fervor they fled from their religious past. Knowing that many came to define themselves as atheists against rigid religious upbringing, I don't **judge their disdain and frustration.**

However, like venom in veins, it keeps them from moving forward to having a more productive discourse. So often, when the religious and non-religious traditions grapple with the big question, like ontological definition, theorized cosmology, or the inherent nature of man, these discussions happen separately, without an engagement that is both fruitful and intriguing. I know many of those atheists have something wonderful to bring to that discussion, if they would stop throwing rocks at the window and come sit at the table.

So this is what I propose to my Christian and atheist friends: If we Christians challenge ourselves, our communities and congregations, to treat our atheist brothers and sisters as equitable members of our communities, nation, and in the pursuit of truth, will atheists recognize the value of faith to those who believe, even while they may respectfully disagree? As atheism quickly becomes the second largest philosophical tradition in America, the two communities will only have a greater need of a Memorandum of Understanding to frame how we can collectively work together to challenge the greater issues that face us, which starts by recognizing that it's not each other.

Not sure where to start? Let's feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and protect human dignity. While community service can be utterly rational, I am also pretty sure Jesus would be down for that, too.

**With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion—Steven Weinberg**

**A man's ethical behavior should be based effectively on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death—Albert Einstein**

**I have examined all the known superstitions of the world, and I do not find in our particular superstition of Christianity one redeeming feature. They are all alike founded on fables and mythology—Thomas Jefferson**

**I do not think it is necessary to believe that the same God who has given us our senses, reason, and intelligence wished us to abandon their use, giving us by some other means the information that we could gain through them\_Galileo**



**(Continued from Page 1)**

CFI's sweeping February 2009 position paper, "Safeguarding Religious Liberty in Charitable Choice and Faith-Based Initiatives," makes for now-sad reading with its litany of elements that needed fixing that will instead be left just as Bush's White House instituted them.\*

But if we focus on individual reforms undertaken and those passed by, we risk missing the true significance of the administration's action. Viewed from a more distant vantage, Obama's executive order marks the extinction of a fundamental protection that America had long provided religious minorities. For decades, members of minority faiths-and those of no faith whatever-could be secure that their tax dollars would not fund explicitly sectarian, proselytizing social-service organizations. Being that sort of religious charity was recognized as an unconditional bar to public funding. By any sound understanding of the wall between church and state, it only made sense that religious charities that seek to aid their beneficiaries not only with food, shelter, or other physical assistance but also by making them pray or listen to preaching be compelled to obtain their funds solely from religious organizations. (It's not as if contributors to religious groups have shown any incapacity to give.)

But beginning in the Reagan years, conservative ideologues hatched a new argument that it was unfair-indeed, a church-state violation in its own right-to deny such charities access to the public purse. Tragically, some centrist and center-Left politicians fell for it. One was Bill Clinton, who first permitted tax dollars to flow to overtly sectarian charities; another was President Obama. Viewed from the perspective of the past couple of decades, the full import of Obama's executive order can be fully grasped. It signifies nothing less than the final interment of any reasonable hope for that tragic error to be undone in our time. In the eyes of this die-hard secularist, at least, it inflicts a new, and in all likelihood permanent, wound in the sinews of our democracy.

To be sure, no one expected Obama to restore the old bar to public funding of overtly sectarian charities-at least not this soon. Even in his landmark July 1, 2008, speech in Zanesville, Ohio, candidate Obama accepted the noxious principle of maintaining sectarian charities' access to public funding. (Still, his declaration that "[I]f you get a federal grant, you can't use that grant money to proselytize to the people you help, and you can't discriminate against them or against the people you hire on the basis of their religion" set forth a laudable intermediate position that his recent executive order cravenly abandoned.) But, hope remained alive that a new, more progressive administration might have addressed the fundamental injustice of channeling public funds to sectarian charities eventually. Instead, by empaneling the Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and responding to its free-ranging deliberations with the scant roster of faint-hearted reforms set forth in his executive order, Obama sent a clear message that any hope of restoring the wall between sectarian charities and the public treasury as it had existed into the 1990s was stone dead.

What has been lost? I'll be brutally frank. In my opinion, a nation that will seize a citizen's tax dollars to fund charities steeped in the agenda of a religion that some citizens may abhor is less fair, less free, less worthy of the world's adulation-to be blunt, less worth fighting and dying for-than a nation whose citizens (and their consciences) confidently enjoy that elementary protection. America is belittled by the surrender of this principle. It's true that those of us who fear for the nation's ideals have other, arguably bigger grounds for anxiety. Ours was once a nation that didn't hold detainees for indefinite periods and without charge in military prisons. Ours was once a nation that didn't claim the right to assassinate troublesome characters in foreign lands whenever doing so seemed to be in the national interest (see Nat Hentoff's op-ed on page 14 of this issue). In the days before such atrocities could be undertaken using remotely piloted drone aircraft, we formerly scrupled not to commit such acts using sniper rifles, subtle poison, or the garrote.

Sadly, a long roster of principles that many viewed as essential components of America's identity in the community of nations now stands in peril. But only one of them was terminated by the executive order of November 17: the onetime principle that no free man or woman should be forced to surrender his or her wealth to support the forcible imposition of religious creeds. RIP.

That's the bad news; now on to the good news. On December 1, the Illinois Legislature completed passage of the Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act, which establishes civil unions for same-sex and opposite-sex couples. During his reelection campaign, Pat Quinn, the state's Democratic governor, pledged that he would sign the bill if it passed, and he is expected to do so.

I cannot blame you, gentle reader, for rubbing your eyes in confusion. "A civil-union bill?," you might ask. "Isn't civil union the stopgap sop that conservatives toss about in hopes of derailing the reform that many Americans now really want, honest-to-goodness same-sex marriage? Isn't same-sex marriage already legal in something like half a dozen states? How can any civil-union bill be worth getting excited about?"

The Illinois law is exciting because in one very important area, it goes where few legislatures in the United States-and amazingly, few in more-liberal Europe either-have gone before. It contains a provision so radical that I can't help wondering whether the solons of Illinois truly understand what they have wrought. (And if they don't, I fervently hope they don't figure it out before their creation is signed into law.)

The Illinois law opens civil unions to opposite-sex couples as well as same-sex couples. Explicitly. As in, the synopsis of the bill defines civil union as "a legal relationship between 2 persons, of either the same or opposite sex" (emphasis added). Nevada and the District of Columbia already have domestic-partnership laws that nowhere restrict their benefits to same-sex couples; Illinois has taken the next giant step.

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## Texas Gov. Rick Perry's Answer to Climate Change: Start Prayin' By Jeff Goodell



Wild weather is once again upon us. Tornadoes have ravaged the midwest and the south (nearly 200 people have been killed in five states as of this morning). Meanwhile, Texas is suffering from the state's worst drought since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Crops are in danger, drinking water supplies are

dwindling. Wildfires have engulfed 1.8 million acres of land, destroying 400 homes.

You might think that there's not much a politician can do about this. But you're wrong.

The other day, Texas Governor Rick Perry took dramatic action to save his state from the ravages of a changing climate. He issued [a proclamation](#) for Days of Prayer for Rain in the State of Texas. For three days, Perry asked Texas to kneel at the pew, or at the foot of their beds, and silently ask God to : bring water to their parched state.

Here's a snippet:

**WHEREAS**, throughout our history, both as a state and as individuals, Texans have been strengthened, assured and lifted up through prayer; it seems right and fitting that the people of Texas should join together in prayer to humbly seek an end to this devastating drought and these dangerous wildfires ...

Never mind that larger droughts in the southwestern U.S. have long been predicted by scientists who model the changes we are likely to face due to ever-rising levels of CO2 in the atmosphere.

Never mind that Texas dumps more carbon pollution into the atmosphere than any other state in the nation -- higher than California and Pennsylvania combined. Were it a separate country, Texas would be the seventh largest carbon polluter in the world.

Never mind that, during his first term, Perry signed legislation to speed construction of 11 new coal plants for the state. Or that he has lead the charge to undermine the EPA's right to limit greenhouse gas pollution.

None of this matters. Because as Perry wrote in his new book, global warming is "all one contrived phony mess that is falling apart under its own weight."

Still, the earth's climate is changing, and so we must pray.

That's alright Rick my rain dance didn't help either. Ed



### Contact Information For Humanists of Ft Worth:

**Chair** Dick Trice [trice932@yahoo.com](mailto:trice932@yahoo.com)  
Tel 817-201-1232

**Vice Chair** John Huffman [john.p.huffman@att.net](mailto:john.p.huffman@att.net)  
cell 817-658-0011

**Secretary** Suzie Lotven [lotven@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lotven@sbcglobal.net)  
Tel 817-927 -7213

**Treasurer** Dolores Ruhs [ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net)  
Tel 817-249-1829

**Past Chair** Michael Little [slittle71@gmail.com](mailto:slittle71@gmail.com)

**Webmaster** Russel Elleven [doctorelleven@gmail.com](mailto:doctorelleven@gmail.com)  
Tel 817-370-2171

**Newsletter Editor** Ray Weil [Cowtown\\_humanist@yahoo.com](mailto:Cowtown_humanist@yahoo.com)  
Tel 817-205-8603

**The Humanists of Ft Worth is a member of:**

