



Volume Nine Number 10 - November 2007

Meeting at Westside Unitarian Universalist Building 901 Page Ave Ft Worth 7 PM, 2nd Wednesday of each month - Nov. gathering is on the 13th. Many of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria at 5:30 prior to the meeting (8th Ave South of Elizabeth Blvd) Join us if you'd like!

HUMANISTS OF FORT WORTH

MINUTES: OCTOBER 10, 2007

The meeting was called to order by the President, Dick Trice, at Westside UU Church.

MINUTES: Minutes for September meeting were unavailable due to the secretary's absence.

TREASURER'S REPORT: No report due to illness of the treasurer.

The evening's program presented, Part 2, of "A Brief History of Disbelief", by Jonathan Miller, recorded on DVD.

Following the presentation, the group engaged in a general discussion of the evolving development of "Disbelief" and the historical people/cultures involved. The discussion included some current terms used in the development of disbelief. The topic of consensus building involving terms currently in use was included along with some reactions to such terms.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: The monthly Saturday evening showing of films is discontinued due to receding attendance. Anyone interested in assuming this responsibility should contact the President.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Thanks to Pennye Lewis for filling in for the vacationing Reed Bilz.

Creationism to be banished from Swedish schools 15th October 2007

Online: <http://www.thelocal.se/8790/>

The Swedish government is to crack down on the role religion plays in independent faith schools. The new rules will include a ban on biology teachers teaching creationism or 'intelligent design' alongside evolution.

"Pupils must be protected from all forms of fundamentalism," said Education Minister Jan Björklund to Dagens Nyheter.

Some Christian schools teach biology students that the world and the organisms on it were created by a supreme being. This is often presented as another valid scientific theory alongside evolution - something most scientists reject.

Religious Education will remain on the curriculum and it will still be allowed to start the school day with prayers. But in classes teachers will be expected to stick to the curriculum.

"End-of-term services in school are great," he said, and added that religious education would remain a school subject. But all elements of religious worship would have to be completely separate from class teaching.

Most independent schools in Sweden are privately owned but funded by government grants.

Björklund also said the Swedish National Agency for Education would double the number of inspections of both council-run and independent schools. He also announced a ban on anonymous financial donations to schools and said he would make it easier to close schools that were breaking the rules.

The stricter rules will be introduced in next year's education act.

Umm ... Pat?

by DarkSyde Sat Oct 13, 2007 at 07:05:23 AM PDT

Pat Buchanan, a conservative pundit who, unlike many of his peers, is right slightly more often than a stopped clock, just ranted on MSNBC that the Nobel Peace Prize has become nothing more than a political power grab by, and I quote, "Swedish Socialists." He went on to add that the Swede Com-mies are spearheading a global domination conspiracy. This is obviously sour grapes on the part of an ideology which has heavily invested in global warming denial and has, once again, been shown by real world events to be dead wrong. But that's not the funniest part of Mr. Buchanan's screed, because the Peace Prize is unique: Unlike other Nobel Prizes, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize is determined by Norwegians and even awarded annually in Oslo, Norway:

Nuns' Evictions Pose Perception Problem for Catholic Church

By Karl Vick Washington Post Staff Writer Thursday, October 4, 2007

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. -- In Southern California, where the Roman Catholic Church has agreed to pay victims of pedophile priests \$660 million, the archdiocese is ordering nuns out of convents so the buildings can be sold to fund the out-of-court settlement.

Here in Santa Barbara, the sins of the fathers are being visited on the Sisters of Bethany. The three nuns living in a modest building on Nopal Street received an eviction notice last month ordering them to be out by Dec. 31. Earlier "would be acceptable as well," the letter said.

Among those being forced to move is Sister Angela Escalera, 69, who, diabetic and able to get around only with a walker, had hoped to live out her days in the Santa Barbara convent. "This is how the archdiocese is going about getting the money to pay off the victims," said her younger sister, Rosemary Escalera Gutierrez, 64, a former nun in the order.

"She said: 'It's such a heavy price to pay for such an ugly thing,'" said Gutierrez, quoting her sister. " 'Children were being victimized.' " The public storm over the evictions has prolonged an excruciating controversy that the Archdiocese of Los Angeles had hoped to begin putting behind it in July when it agreed to payouts to 508 accusers of 221 priests and other male church employees.

Instead, the new flap has raised the question of how much the church has learned about the crucial business of public perception. Gutierrez quoted her sister because church officials slapped a gag order on the nuns.

"What's interesting is the church has not learned its lesson. The church thinks Catholics will still follow it without question," said Denise d'Sant Angelo, a member of Save Our Sisters, a local group formed to resist the eviction. "They're still operating under the shroud of secrecy, and secrecy isn't going to be tolerated by Catholics anymore, especially this new generation. "We're going to kick it up a notch."

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles did not reply to telephone and e-mail messages for this report. A statement posted on its Web site detailed the effort to inform the nuns of their fate and expressed gratitude to the order for its service.

But from Santa Barbara pulpits, a number of priests defended the church. At Holy Cross Parish on Cliff Drive, the Rev. Ludo DeClippel lamented that "these kinds of conflicts within our Church are immediately thrown into the public arena, creating, once more, an hostile public opinion." His remarks appeared in the parish newsletter below an item, tagged "Did you know?" urging parents to teach their children about "bad touching."

DeClippel observed that four other convents were also being shuttered to produce cash for the abuse settlement and that the nuns being evicted "accepted it without protest or public outcry."

"Well, we've been renting," said Sister Rita, in the driveway of the house where she has lived with another sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet, in Camarillo, 40 miles to the southeast. Asked if tenant status meant the nuns acquiesced to the move, she demurred and excused herself.

Nuns take a vow of obedience, and the Catholic Church is perhaps the world's farthest-reaching hierarchy. Gutierrez said her birth sister remains implacably opposed to the eviction but must abide by an order of public silence from the mother general superior of the Sisters of Bethany, who was summoned from Guatemala to address the controversy.

"One of the reasons I left is you have no voice," said Gutierrez, who wore the habit for eight years in the 1960s. Now retired from a second career teaching English, she expressed dismay that the Los Angeles archdiocese, after being pilloried for its reluctance to investigate allegations of sexual abuse, appeared to have gone to ground again.

"It's the same mistake all over again: 'Be quiet, be quiet. Don't say anything. Don't rock the boat,'" Gutierrez said. Another former Bethany sister, Evangelina Diaz, said the defensive posture was also apt to hurt recruiting, seldom easy for the Catholic Church in recent decades.

"Look, a gag rule on three nuns! Holy mackerel!" said Diaz, 74, in the parking lot outside the convent. "They do this to the ones who've been around for 57 years? No wonder they don't get more vocations. Would you want to join?"

By local standards the convent property promises no economic windfall. Oprah Winfrey paid \$50 million for an estate in neighboring Montecito. But in the heavily Hispanic, relatively poor section of Santa Barbara that the sisters have served since 1952, comparable two-bedroom homes go for around \$700,000.

(Continued on Page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

That is roughly one-tenth of 1 percent of the \$660 million the archdiocese agreed to pay accusers. Among them are former altar boys who described being molested by the late Rev. Matthew Kelly at Our Lady of Guadalupe, the church adjacent to the convent.

"These nuns are precious to us, but there are priests living in fabulous-looking little houses, by themselves," Diaz said. "You don't see them getting kicked out."

In fact the handsome residence of the Santa Barbara bishop -- once a convent—remains safe behind seven palms on a corner lot, in a neighborhood of \$2 million homes.

The building is the largest in a neighborhood where homes have been fetching \$2 million.

New Humanist Update #78 (9 October 2007)

If you don't believe in God, what should you call yourself? "Atheist", I hear you cry, but Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*, thinks non-believers should stop using the term, along with other labels like "humanist", "rationalist" and "sceptic". He says there's no need to define yourself by something you don't believe in and thinks using the word "atheist" could be counter-productive, causing the godless to be viewed as a "cranky sub-culture" and risking "squander[ing] the trust of people who would otherwise agree with us on specific issues."

Contrast this with Richard Dawkins' latest publicity drive, the "OUT Campaign", which he's currently promoting in the US. He wants atheists to come out loud and proud and literally wear the t-shirt, wandering the streets wearing merchandise emblazoned with a big, red "A" for "Atheist".

Harris's words have caused a bit of a stir, so we thought we'd throw the question to our readers. The latest opinion poll on our blog asks if Harris is right to say the godless should reject labels, or whether it is necessary to unite under a collective name to take on the might of organised religion. Cast your vote by following the link below.

<http://newhumanist.org.uk/newsletter/>

I still prefer nullifidian to describe my belief, or lack thereof. Ed.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll find news of the results of our previous poll where we asked whether Dawkins and Hitchens are good for humanism, a sneak preview of what's coming up in the next issue of *New Humanist*, and details of how to obtain a free trial copy. www.newhumanist.org.uk

"From the first moment I looked into that horror on September 11th, into that fireball, into that explosion of horror, I knew it, I recognized an old companion. I recognized religion". *Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, Professor of Theology at St Joseph's Seminary in New York.*

"Religion drove those planes into those buildings, it's amazing how good religion is at mobilizing people to do awful, murderous things. There is this dark side to it, and anyone who loves religious experience, including me, better begin to own that there is a serious shadow side to this thing." - Rabbi Brad Hirschfeld.

"After September 11, the face of God was a blank slate for me. God could not be counted on in the way I thought God could be counted on." - Rev. Joseph Griesedieck, Episcopal priest



 American Friends Service Committee

Church-State Watchdog Group Urges Senate To Drop Prayers Or At Least Make Them Non-Sectarian

The Pennsylvania Senate should stop using sectarian prayers to open its deliberations, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In a letter sent to Senate officials Oct. 10, attorneys with Americans United note that Senate proceedings frequently begin with prayers that include sectarian language, such as references to Jesus Christ. AU says government endorsement of one religion over others is unconstitutional and asks that it be dropped.

The Supreme Court has approved non-sectarian invocations before state legislatures, but several lower courts have struck down sectarian prayers before state and local government meetings.

"I don't think legislatures should open with prayers," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "But if they're going to, the prayers should be non-sectarian.

"Government bodies must represent all citizens," continued Lynn. "The use of prayers with sectarian language implies that some religious groups enjoy favored status with the state."

The AU letter, signed by Americans United Legal Director Ayesha Khan and AU attorney Nancy Leong, notes that one guest minister closed his prayer "in the name of Jesus." Another mentioned, "Jesus Christ our Lord" and a third stated, "We ask this in Your strength, by Your power, in the name of Your Son."

Asserts the AU letter, "Similar Christian religious references have occurred at many other sessions. In light of these incidents, we believe it would be advisable for you to ask prayer-givers to limit their prayers to non-sectarian, ecumenical entreaties."

The letter goes on to point out that even non sectarian prayer can make some residents feel like outsiders.

Last year, a federal court ordered the Indiana House of Representatives to stop opening its sessions with sectarian prayer. The court faulted the legislature for using mostly Christian prayers and told the body to use non-sectarian invocations in the future.

"Because the Pennsylvania Senate is a representative body for all its residents, religious and nonreligious alike," the letter observes, "we urge you to consider ceasing the prayers altogether in order to make all feel equally welcome at sessions of the Senate.

Americans United is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1947, the organization educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation in safeguarding religious freedom.

Thanks to Don Ruhs for bringing this to the editors attention.

God sanctioned violence causes harm

Not only action films and killer computer games can increase aggressive behavior. New research proves: literary texts do the same, especially those offering divine justification for acts of violence. And their influence is not limited to religious extremists. Scientists of the reputed Institute for Social Research (ISR) at Michigan University (USA) found that reading about violence in the name of God provokes aggression in average believers and even non-believers. "It's important to note that we obtained evidence supporting this hypothesis in samples of university students who were, in our estimation, not typical of the terrorists who blow up civilians," wrote Brad Bushman, professor of psychology and communication at ISR. "Even among our participants who were not religiously devout, exposure to God-sanctioned violence increased subsequent aggression. That the effect was found in such a sample may attest to the insidious power of exposure to literary scriptural violence."

Vitter Earmark Withdrawn

Speaking on the Senate floor on October 17, 2007, Senator David Vitter (R-Louisiana) withdrew a controversial \$100,000 earmark that he previously added to the appropriations bill for the departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. The earmark was to the Louisiana Family Forum, a religious right group with a long history of promoting creationism and attacking evolution education in the state, including backing a "strengths and weaknesses" policy in Ouachita Parish.

Critics were quick to note the inappropriateness of devoting public funds to efforts to undermine the integrity of science education and to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. A coalition of concerned organizations, including Americans United for Separation of Church and State and NCSE, circulated a [letter](#) protesting the Vitter earmark to the members of the Senate; People for the American Way circulated its own [letter](#). NCSE also urged its members to lobby their senators.

"When I was young I used to pray for a bike, then I realized that God doesn't work that way....So I stole a bike and prayed for forgiveness." anon

Ann Coulterisms (May I suggest you don't read this if you have just eaten)

“If we took away women’s right to vote, we’d never have to worry about another Democrat president. It’s kind of a pipe dream, it’s a personal fantasy of mine, but I don’t think it’s going to happen. And it is a good way of making the point that women are voting so stupidly, at least single women.

“It also makes the point, it is kind of embarrassing, the Democratic Party ought to be hanging its head in shame, that it has so much difficulty getting men to vote for it. I mean, you do see it’s the party of women and We’ll pay for health care and tuition and day care — and here, what else can we give you, soccer moms?”

Ann Coulter Oct 4, 2007

“We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed civilians. That's war. And this is war.”

Ann Coulter

"If I'm going to say anything about John Edwards in the future, I'll just wish he had been killed in a terrorist assassination plot."

Ann Coulter

"These broads are millionaires, lionized on TV and in articles about them, reveling in their status as celebrities and stalked by griefparrazies. I have never seen people enjoying their husband's deaths so much." - on 9/11 widows who have been critical of the Bush administration

Ann Coulter

During World War 2 the infamous Ilse Koch was known as the *Bitch of Buchenwald* for her bestial cruelty and sadistic behavior. She was the wife of Karl Koch, the Commandant of Buchenwald, and struck fear into the inmates daily. She was especially fond of riding her horse through the camp, whipping any prisoner who attracted her attention.

Her hobby was collecting lampshades, book covers, and gloves made from the skins of specially murdered concentration camp inmates, and shrunken human skulls.

Ilse Koch was tried by an American military tribunal in 1947, found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. But her sentence was reduced to four years and she was soon released. Rearrested in 1949, Ilse Koch was tried before a West German court for the killing of German nationals, and on January 15, 1951, she was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. She committed suicide in a Bavarian prison on September 1, 1967.

I find it difficult deciding whether Ann Coulter or Else Koch is the least lovable. I also wonder what Coulter would have done as a prison camp guard—the same as Ilse, I suspect. She's already a Nazi. Ed.



Cut and paste the above for more on Coulter.

” Christians... say that if you are an atheist you have to be a nihilist and there’s no meaning any more. Well, that’s nonsense... Now that I’m conscious, now that I’m responsible, there is a meaning, and it is to make things better and to work for greater good and greater wisdom. That’s my meaning – and it comes from my understanding of my position. It’s not nihilism at all. It’s very far from it.”

Philip Pullman CBE Author and distinguished supporter of Humanism

Phillip Pullman’s book “The Golden Compass” has been made into a movie which will debut on Dec 7, 2007

<http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=2234>

Ah! If we could be as enlightened as Norway

Rev. Rick Mason notes that atheism is on the rise. He blames Christian fundamentalism. Certainly the ineptness, dishonesty and lack of ethics of the overtly God-fearing Bush administration may be turning people off on God.

A case study shows what this could mean for America. Norway has embraced secularism at the expense of its Christian roots. A 2005 survey conducted by Gallup International rated Norway the least religious country in Western Europe.

In Norway, 82.9 percent of the population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (they are automatically registered at birth and few bother to be unregistered). However, only approximately 10 percent regularly attend church services and identify themselves as being personally Christian.

A 2006 survey found: 29 percent believe in a god or deity; 23 percent believe in a higher power without being certain of what; 26 percent don't believe in God or higher powers; 22 percent have doubts.

Depending on the definition of atheism, Norway thus has between 26 percent and 71 percent atheists. **The Norwegian Humanist Association is the world's largest humanist association per capita.**

And what has secularism done to Norway? The Global Peace Index * rates Norway the most peaceful country in the world. The Human Development Index **, a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standard of living, has ranked Norway No. 1 every year for the last five years.

Norway has the second highest GDP per capita in the world, an unemployment rate below 2 percent, and average hourly wages among the world's highest.

Letter to the editor *The Montgomery*, (AL) Advertiser Oct 14, 2007 submitted by David N. Miles

* For Global Peace Index ranking, go to: <http://www.visionofhumanity.com/rankings/http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/>

** For Human Development Index go to: <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/>

Secularism is sweeping Europe

With the new school year starting in September, children in Spain will have a new secular civics class that has the Roman Catholic Church up in arms. "Education for citizenship" will include ethics, civics and human rights. Based on the values enshrined in the 1978 Constitution, it is designed to prepare students in public elementary and junior high schools to become self-determined, responsible and tolerant citizens of a modern, pluralistic democracy.

Finally, Norway has to withdraw compulsory religious classes in public schools. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled on 27 June 2007 that the so-called KRL classes (Christian, religious and life stance education) violated Article 2 of the European Human Rights convention. Education Minister Øystein Djupedal announced that necessary changes were being prepared.

Source: <http://www.rationalistinternational.net/>

Your officers may be contacted as follows:

Chair: Dick Trice

7563 Casburn Ct. Ft Worth, TX 76120 Phone 817-446-3840
email paandmatrice@sbcglobal.net

Vice Chair and Newsletter Editor: Ray Weil

2912 Woodlark Dr. Ft Worth, TX 76123 Phone: 817-346-2402
cell: 817-205-8603 email alphamail@myway.com

Secretary: Reed Bilz

6130 Haley Ln Ft Worth, TX 76132 Phone 817-292-7974 email
rbilz@charter.net

Treasurer: Dolores Ruhs

1036 Hill Top Pass Benbrook, TX 76126 Phone 817-249-1829
email ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net

Recent Past Chair: Don Ruhs

1036 Hill Top Pass Benbrook TX 76126 Phone 817 249-1829
email: laidback935@sbcglobal.net

Past Chair: Mike Haney

924 Roaring Springs Rd Ft Worth, TX 76114 Phone 817-737-7047
email mhaneyinfw@charter.net

Past Chair and Webmaster: Russell Elleven

6120 Comfort Dr Ft Worth, TX 76132 Phone 817-370-2171
doctorelleven@gmail.com