COWTOWN



HUMANIST

2010

August

The Humanists of Ft Worth meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist building 901 Page Ave at 7 PM



From The Chair

HOFW meets Wednesday, Aug 11, at 7 p.m. at Westside. Mr. "My Fair Share Lady," Myron Ice will share his thoughts on the sometimes painful process of finally embracing logic and reason on a daily basis, but also the joy and peace

that intellectual honesty brings. He will briefly share his "journey" as it parallels the journey of the funny and very insightful comedian Julia Sweeney of Saturday Night Live fame



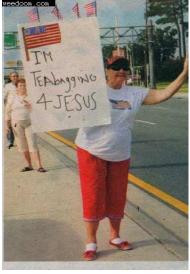
Myron will show snippets of her hilarious one-woman show "Letting Go of God." Come and learn about her story and how it not only parallels Myron's but probably yours as well. Come ready to laugh and share your own story!

Dick Trice, Chair

Excerpted from THE AGE OF AMERICAN UNREASON by Susan Jacoby

This impassioned, tough-minded work of contemporary history—a New York Times bestseller in 2008—paints a disturbing portrait of a mutant strain of public ignorance, anti-rationalism, and anti-intellectualism that has developed over the past four decades and now threatens the future of American democracy. In an updated 2009 paperback edition, the author examines the challenges posed by the current anti-rational landscape for the new administration of Barack Obama, who pledged during his campaign to restore reason and science in public policy-making. Combining historical analysis with contemporary observation, Susan Jacoby dissects a culture at odds with America's heritage of Enlightenment reason and with modern knowledge and science. With mordant wit, the author offers an unsparing indictment of the ways in which dumbness has been defined downward

Barnes and Noble \$11.48 Online Price



You're not likely to find a funnier sign than this at a teabagging gathering

For those of you who don't know what teabagging really means, cut and paste:

http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=teabagging

Pope Names New Leader of Order Beset by Scandal By ELISABETTA POVOLEDO NY Times July 9, 2010

MILAN — <u>Pope Benedict XVI</u> appointed a senior <u>Vatican</u> official on Friday to take control of the Legionaries of Christ, the powerful worldwide religious order rocked by scandal after it emerged that its charismatic founder had molested underage seminarians and secretly fathered several children.

At the end of an eight-month investigation, the pope named Archbishop Velasio De Paolis, president of the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See, as pontifical delegate for the Legionaries.

Benedict's measures aim to assist "in the demanding path of purification and renewal that awaits the congregation," the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said Friday on Vatican radio.

The decision to take over the order has been the most direct response on the part of the pope to the growing sexual abuse scandal that has embroiled the Roman Catholic Church in recent months

Changes to the rules that administer ecclesiastical discipline against priests who sexually abuse minors are also expected to be made public in the next few days.

Humanists Celebrate CLS vs. Martinez Decision

The American Humanist Association expressed enthusiastic approval today of the Supreme Court's affirmation of the 9th Circuit Court's decision allowing the California Hastings College of the Law to deny recognition to a Christian-only student group.

"The Supreme Court's decision in CLS v. Martinez recognizes the important purposes served by nondiscrimination policies at public universities. Equality, not religious based discrimination, is the core American principle here," said Bob Ritter, attorney and legal coordinator of the Appignani Humanist Legal Center.

"As the American Humanist Association asked in its friend of the court brief, the Court found that Hastings' 'all comers' policy is a reasonable, viewpoint neutral condition for using the schools facilities, funds and channels of communication," said Ritter. "Consequently, the policy did not transgress First Amendment limitations."

The Christian Legal Society (CLS) sued the California Hastings College of the Law in 2004 after being barred from school funding, priority access to facilities and use of Hasting's logo. This ban was in response to the CLS's exclusion of non-Christians and gays from voting and leadership positions. The CLS was denied its exemption request from the school's non-discrimination policy, which prohibited student groups from discriminating on the basis of "race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, sex or sexual orientation." The District Court ruled this policy permissible and viewpoint neutral, an opinion echoed in the Supreme Court's decision.

"Although the First Amendment may protect the CLS's discriminatory practices off campus," wrote Justice John Paul Stevens in the concurring opinion, "it does not require a public university to validate and support them." In the majority opinion, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg also noted the group's capability to remain intact without official status and rejected the CLS's assertion that unsympathetic students could sabotage the Christian group and gain control.

"This decision is a victory for humanists and students alike," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "Discrimination shouldn't be university-funded. With this ruling, students can remain confident that their tuition money won't be given to groups intending to exclude them."

The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) advocates for the rights and viewpoints of humanists and others who advocate that one can be good without a belief in God. Founded in 1941 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., its work is extended through more than 100 local chapters and affiliates across America.

Is it God or the Catholic Church facing 'eclipse' in the West?

Catholicism, the religion that gave the world the idea of the missionary, is struggling on its historic home turf.

Pope Benedict XVI is creating a <u>new Vatican office to fight secularization</u> and "re-evangelize" the West, says Associated Press, which calls this "tacit acknowledgment that his attempts to reinvigorate Christianity in Europe haven't succeeded and need a new boost. "

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Despite spending his entire clerical career calling for faith in Europe, and

making it a focus of the early years of his pontificate, he seemed to be admitting he's been outrun by "a serious crisis of the sense of the Christian faith and role of the Church," both in Europe and the West, that he describes as "progressive secularization of society and a sort of 'eclipse of the sense of God."

But what if the sense of God is still there -- just not within the Catholic confines? Americans are still plenty spiritual and while I haven't studied surveys of spirituality v. religion in Europe, it's hard to imagine they've forsaken any interest in or awareness of the ineffable.

Is the issue secularization v. God or the world v. the Church? Is God or the Catholic Church getting eclipsed here?

The Atheist vs The Rabbi By David Wolpe

Ambling across the lobby with a cigarette in one hand and a glass of wine in the other, my antagonist nodded to me and said, "Hello, darling."

It was almost time for another public debate with Christopher Hitchens.

For the past few years, Christopher Hitchens (never Chris -- I made that mistake exactly once) and I have been on an "atheist vs. rabbi" roadshow, debating the worth of religion and the reality of God in cities across America. Clutching our books -- his best-selling "God Is Not Great" and my lesser-known "Why Faith Matters" -- we have been invited by universities and synagogues to be partisans in the most recent culture clash: the fight over faith.

My opponent is one of the nouveau scourges, a debunker of religion and the idea of God, along with fellow combatants such as Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker. Hitchens is particularly distinguished by the aggressive elegance of his wit. This evening I would protest his many interruptions, complaining that, after all, not once had I interrupted him. "Ah," he said, "you weren't quick enough."

I'm just trying to keep up.

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I have no right to complain about the bruises, I suppose, since I always wanted to debate the best. As the Talmud teaches, "If you are going to hang yourself, do it from a tall tree." Hitchens is a California redwood.

He is also part of a powerful cultural moment. After Sept. 11, 2001, religion seemed to many to be less a consolation for suffering than a cause. Science, not spirituality, offered the promise of a moderate, prosperous and anchored life; reason would deliver salvation. Never mind that science is morally neutral and reason is used as often to upend as to build; the dangers of technology easily fade when we see clerics debasing faith through all sorts of moral outrages. And nobody puts a more entertainingly toxic spin on those outrages than Hitchens.

We began our acquaintance in New York in November 2008, when Temple Emanu-el, reputedly the largest synagogue in the world, invited us to debate each other. At a reception before the event, we were approached by someone who noted one of the blurbs on the back of my book: "Wolpe answers these challenges with such kindness and thoughtfulness that even Christopher Hitchens might find his heart warmed." The man asked Hitchens: So, did it warm your heart?

"Oh, no," Hitchens replied, holding the book up for skeptical inspection. "My heart is far too reptilian for that."

Well, hello to you, too.

As we climbed the podium, I mentioned that his book title, "God Is Not Great," (which, on the book's cover, has a pugnaciously lowercase "god") was exactly correct. Maimonides said in the 12th century that any affirmative statement about God must be incorrect because it's inherently limiting. You can say "God is not bad," and that leaves an infinite number of things for God to be. But, strictly speaking, to say"God is great" might be taken to mean not very great, or not transcendent. So you see, I told him, we agree.

"Good," he answered. "Why don't we begin with that?"

I wasn't so naive as to begin a debate in front of 2,000 people by acceding to my opponent's book title, but having viewed his previous performances, I was prepared to hit a few tender spots. When he maintained that religion is stupid because it presumes that humans possessed no morality until God told them what to do, I answered that the Bible condemns Cain's murder of Abel long before any laws were handed down at Sinai.

The Bible knows that we know murder is wrong. The function of the "Thou shall not kill"commandment, I said, is to reinforce that the prohibition is not simply a societal rule but a mandate from God to all people. "And if you think that mandate doesn't matter," I concluded, "all I can say is you haven't paid much attention to the 20th century."

I felt good about that exchange -- the way boxers, staggering up from the canvas, think back to that one jab they landed.

We then sparred over some old terrain: I insisted that if we are products of evolution and genetics alone then we have no certain ground for morality. For if morals do not originate beyond ourselves, why not disobey whenever we feel it will benefit us? He countered that morality was a strange plea coming from religion, a source of so much suffering. I said Nazism and communism (secular ideologies both) speak poorly for societies without religion. He countered with religion's oppression of women. And besides, he said, isn't circumcision really mutilation, if we're honest about it?

After two hours of debate and audience questions, Hitchens, who was stunned to discover in his 30s that he is Jewish, mentioned that each year he has a Passover seder at his house. "What?" -- I was floored. He quickly assured me that it is a celebration of freedom, nothing religious about it. (I can't help think how chic it would be to say, "Oh yes, last year I had seder at the Hitchenses'.")

One of my most uncomfortable moments in our various showdowns was in Los Angeles at the Wilshire Theatre. With my then-12-year-old daughter sitting in the front row, the moderator asked Hitchens if he had ever prayed. "Yes," he said, "once, for an erection." I decided not to pursue the question of the efficacy of prayer.

Later we sign copies of our books for the audience. Five or 10 kindly souls stand in my line. His stretches out as long as the eye can see. He looks up at me and winks.

The smart money, he seems to be saying, is in heresy.

David Wolpe, who writes for The Washington Post's On Faith blog, is the rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles and the author of "Why Faith Matters.

> The US Supreme Court declined Monday to hear an appeal by the Vatican in a landmark case that opens the way for priests in the United States to stand trial for pedophilia. July 2010

Allowing a federal appeals court ruling to stand, the decision means Vatican officials including theoretically Pope Benedict XVI could face questioning under oath related to a litany of child sex abuse cases.

Creationists cannot issue Masters of Science degrees

Back in March of 2009, I reported that Republican Leo Berman, who was a member of the House Higher Education Committee of Texas, was the sole sponsor of House Bill 2800 that was introduced on March 9, 2009 in the Texas House of Representatives. That bill was aimed at allowing the Institute for Creation Research Graduate School (ICRGS) to award master's degrees in science. (ICRGS has the right to grant master's degrees in science in California, but that is not the case in Texas.)

Judge Sparks, in his order, reprimanded ICRGS, in a sense, and slammed their suit by saying, "Having addressed this primary issue, the Court will proceed to address each of ICRGS's causes of action in turn, to the extent it is able to understand them. It appears that although the Court has twice required Plaintiff to replead and set forth a short and plain statement of the relief requested, Plaintiff is entirely unable to file a complaint which is not overly verbose, disjointed, incoherent, maundering, and full of irrelevant information."

It irks me to no end that mythologists in ANY state can issue a degree in science. They use the MS degree to legitimize their non-science and so will fight on trying to merge these two mutually-exclusive concepts. It is silly, ridiculous, and ludicrous that degrees can be given out that are called "science" rather than what they really are — degrees in wishful thinking.

At least, this time, Texas got it right.

From www.atheists.org

America's Addiction to Belief by Brian Trent Published in the July/August 2010 Humanist

"Barack Obama won't show us his birth certificate," insists Steve, a Connecticut resident and small business owner, while shoveling his walk during one of this year's snowstorms. "He's a Muslim terrorist. And you know what really bothers me? He is doing exactly what Hitler did."

Steve, forty-five, has plenty of other opinions relating to the American president, culture, and society. He can rattle off the prized talking points of this country's culture of belief without missing a beat: The moon landing was a hoax; the world is ending in 2012; 9/11 was an inside job; creationism is valid science.

A hard-working fellow and family man in a post-industrial factory town of a blue state, Steve does not come across as fanatical. Yet his adherence to raw belief—a position unassailable by factual counter-data—is more than an inherently dangerous American mindset. It is a deadly challenge to the aim of humanism.

The "belief" mindset is pretty common in the news these days. That much of it seems directed at the current presidential administration is almost irrelevant, though we should linger here just a moment to reflect that it's now getting legal attention: the U.S. Army is set to court-martial a soldier who refused deployment to Afghanistan because the soldier—Lt. Colonel Terry Lakin—shares with Steve the belief that President Obama is not a U.S. citizen. Neither Lakin nor Steve nor thousands of other "birthers" can put forth any evidence, documentation, or data that with-

stands the test of scrutiny. They just, well, believe it.

Ironically enough, their blind allegiance is precisely like the more extreme elements of their political rivals. While "birthers" are largely a Republican phenomenon, the "9/11 Truth Movement" stems chiefly from the liberal wing of American politics—as fervent in their belief that the United States' own government used controlled demolition to destroy the Twin Towers as the birthers are that Obama has perpetrated a global hoax to keep his birth certificate under wraps.

Clearly the appeal of blind faith has been part of human history since the earliest days of Babylonia. In the United States, however, we have taken this tendency to disturbing new heights. Emboldened by the sharp rise of rabid partisanship (a legacy of the post-Karl Rovian era) and the ubiquitous presence of mass media, Americans have come to be belief's poster children. Reactionary, emotional, and almost blissfully willing to ignore facts if they contradict a cemented position.

"A conservative can wake up in the morning and never have his or her views challenged. And the same is true for liberals," said none other than MSNBC's Joe Scarborough in a *Newsweek* interview last summer. "It's just stunning to me how difficult it is to have a political conversation with adults. It's very disturbing to me as someone fired upon by the left and right pretty regularly... Where is the rational middle?"

The overriding irony is that in the United States, the culture of belief is certainly not a partisan issue. When it comes to the above-mentioned rallying points for this particular culture, people are oddly united across political divisions, faiths, and ideologies. So too is blind belief the *de facto* culture of the blogosphere and mass media.

It is a culture that thrives on the false principle that "all opinions are equal," even those without a shred of factual data, documentation, or reasoned methodology. It is a culture where 20 percent of the American people believe NASA faked the Apollo moon landings, and where *half* the population believes the world was made in six days.

When the scholar Katib Chelebi spoke the words that opened this piece, it was in response to a tidal shift in the culture of seventeenth-century Turkey. Chelebi was a cartographer, historian, traveler, philosopher, and writer. He had been exposed to the works of the ancient Greeks and appreciated their methodical approach to investigation. Yet the rationalist mindset of Turkish schools was descending into dogmatism. It appealed to emotions and impulsiveness. It catered to the basement of the human mind which today's neurologists would call the r-complex. Chelebi keenly perceived this devolution and saw the road ahead, which diverged in the proverbial woods; Chelebi was aghast at the path his people were choosing.

There is a certain irony in the case of the United States; a nation founded on Enlightenment principles of rationality, and now so eagerly becoming a culture of raw, unquestioning belief. When we hear about an alleged culture war, we tend to think of it in political terms like gay marriage or abortion. The truth goes deeper.

(Continued on page 6)

No Dominion: The Lonely, Dangerous Fight Against Christian Supremacists In-

side the Armed

Forces Sunday 11 July 2010 By Matthew Harwood, **Truthout**

In his fight against British imperialism, Mahatma Gandhi described the life cycle of successful civil disobedience: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Mikey Weinstein, the 55-year-old



founder of the Albuquerque, New Mexico-based Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), likes to quote it, knowing full well he's crossed the line into a bloody-knuckle brawl. Over the past year, Weinstein and his organization have recorded a tremendous string of victories in the fight against Christian supremacists inside the armed forces.

In January, the MRFF broke the story on the Pentagon's Jesus Rifles, where rifle scopes used in Afghanistan and Iraq were embossed with New Testament verses. In April, he got the military to rescind its invitation to the Reverend Franklin Graham to speak at May's National Prayer Day because of Islamophobic remarks. Most shockingly, MRFF received its second nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in late October. These high-profile victories have earned him the enmity of the hardcore Christian Right and the mentally unstable. And the crazies are getting crazier. Weinstein and his family are bombarded with hate mail, from the grammatically incorrect and easy to dismiss - "I hope all your kids turn out gay as hell, take it in the ass, and get aids and die!!!!" - to the kind of threats that immediately make you leap out of your chair and double-check that the doors and windows are locked. (MRFF has referred multiple death threats on Mikey, his family, and MRFF employees to the FBI.)

Unlike Gandhi, Mikey's no pacifist. Aggression rises up in his voice like a white shark's fin breaks the waves. In a recent conversation, Mikey bragged how a punk wouldn't shut up in a movie. When a confrontation ensued and the man took a wild swing, Mikey put him down. None of this is surprising. Weinstein boxed during his Air Force days, his face marked by a strong jawline sitting below a bald head on top of a stocky body - a cross between Rocky Marciano and Butter Bean. Simply put: Mikey Weinstein can be a brute and a zealot. He knows this and admits it freely. But he believes it's the only position a reasonable person can take when confronted with a faction dedicated to mutating the U.S. military into "a weaponized Gospel of Jesus Christ."

But for all of his rhetorical excesses and bravado, Weinstein's fight is simple and correct. The United States military cannot favor one religious sect over another,

staying true to the Constitution's establishment clause that service members pledge to defend. More pragmatically, the military cannot favor one religious sect over another because it's destructive of good order and discipline, creating divisions between service members when they must rely on the guy next to them to survive in a firefight. Yet inside the U.S. military a small, determined, and fanatical clique wants to abuse its power and prosetlyze to service members below them in the chain of command. Through this captive market, they can inject their peculiar ideology into the most powerful institution on earth. As Weinstein likes to say, this isn't just a civil rights issue, it's a national security threat of the gravest magnitude. The description sounds hyberbolic, but according to Weinstein there's a pervasive Christian supremacist milieu inside the U.S. military that's a danger not only to constitutional order. but to the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. What's ironic about Mikey's fight is that he never thought about becoming "a civil rights activist." He discovered his calling by rising up like a grizzly bear for his son.

The Academy

The Weinstein family is an Air Force family. After graduating from the Naval Academy in 1953, Mikey's father switched to the Air Force to pursue new opportunities in a new service. Mikey followed in his footsteps, as did his two sons, Casey and Curtis. Casey, the oldest, even met his wife Amanda at the Air Force Academy while they were cadets there. Mikey's daughter Amber dates an Academy graduate - 2nd Lt. Mack Delgado, a Christian with a cross tattooed on his chest, a detail Mikey points out every time his name's brought up. It's a family whose life orbits around the Academy, although that gravitational pull has slipped. As recounted in his 2006 book, With God on Our Side,

Weinstein's confrontation with Christian supremacism began during his youngest son Curtis's freshman year at the Academy in Colorado Springs. Sitting at the base of Pike's Peak, Colorado Springs has been called the Christian Mecca. More than any city in America, evangelical Christianity saturates its streets. For instance, James Dobson's Focus on the Family sits just across the interstate from the Air Force Academy's airfield. Before he was outed for allegedly doing meth and banging a male prostitute, the Rev. Ted Haggard ran the 14,000-strong New Life Church in Colorado Springs. That extreme conservative religiosity has long permeated the Academy. Unsurprisingly, it doesn't like or respect diversity of any kind, as two generations of Weinstein's would discover.

Bad memories flooded back from Mikey's own time at the Academy, which he never told anyone about except for his wife, Bonnie. During his freshman year at the Academy, Mikey first faced anti-Semitic notes taped to his door that quickly escalated into two violent ambushes. The first time Mikey says he was attacked from behind inside an Academy academic building and thrown down the stairs, waking up in a pool of his own blood. The second time came while he was in the john. His attacker kicked in the stall and tore him up. "I was a victim, and having to admit that, even now, fucking pisses me off and makes me feel ashamed," he told the coauthor of *With God on Our Side*, David Seay. Mikey was reduced to an Auschwitz Jew rather than the Warsaw Ghetto Jew he idol-

izes. For more cut and paste the following:

http://www.truth-out.org/no-dominion-the-lonely-dangerous-fight-against-christian-supremacists-inside-armed-forces61214

America's addiction to belief (continued from page 3)

Like Chelebi's era, our real battle is for a critical thinking. It is about our fundamental approach to the universe, and is nothing less than a line in the sand between the logical and delusional.

Consider the subject of gravity. No one doubts it. Jump off your roof and you can clearly demonstrate its reality. Great thinkers have contemplated the nature of this mysterious force, and it was Albert Einstein (elaborating on Newton) who created the geometric model we accept today.

Yet our theory of gravity is not a belief system. Einstein didn't preach from a mountain or circulate pamphlets to justify his position. More importantly, the world didn't instantly drop to its knees and chant the merits of curved space. His theory was examined and cross-examined. It was tested and retested, and accumulated such mounds of evidence that it is now accepted.

Are there alternative theories to gravity? Well, we could easily invent one: the force of gravity is in fact a cabal of ghosts pressing down on our heads. Of course, such a statement is a hypothesis, not a theory. It only becomes an accepted theory if we can test it, retest it, and provide evidence and documentation for it. It must stand up to scrutiny. Otherwise it's simply a fairy tale. To put a finer point on it, it is irrational.

This irrationality is the new American zeitgeist. Even a cursory glance at the political blogosphere and media outlets demonstrates this over and over. One example, taken not only from Steve but from a good deal of pundits and politicians is that Barack Obama is a Muslim.

In June 2009 President Obama visited Cairo and made overtures of communication to the local Muslim population. Predictably, this act relit the battle-cries from political opponents who had spent much time during the presidential election stating that Obama was in fact a secret Muslim.

That essentially is the argument in four words: *Obama* is a *Muslim*. The implication we're left with is that it's somehow wrong to be Muslim in America because (and here we tap another rampant falsity) America is a Christian nation. It encourages a kind of juvenile math: Muslim leader in charge of Christian country equals bad.

Of course, the United States was founded on a secular Constitution that, saw fit to avoid religious language entirely, and even took pains to include items like Article 6 (declaring that no religious test is required for public officials) and the establishment clause of the very first amendment to it: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.* It established a secular government that permits religious liberty, not a religious government mandating religious favoritism or fundamentalism.

Catholics Pray for Christopher Hitchens

Hordes of atheists are commenting on <u>yesterday's post from a Catholic priest</u>, Rev Robert Barron who says Christians should pray for the cancer-stricken Christopher Hitchens, even if he is an enemy of religion. Far from being touched by the priest's gesture, the atheists are mostly offended:

There have been multiple scientific studies that show that prayer does not have any impact on whether someone is cured of a serious illness. It's time Christians just stopped worrying about people that don't believe in their sky god. Atheists don't care if you pray for them, your god does not exist.

Editor's Note: The Rev. Robert Barron, a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago, is founder of WordOnFire.org and host of the Catholicism Project. He is the Francis Cardinal George Professor of Faith and Culture at Mundelein Seminary. Quoted on CNN July 14, 2010

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And



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