



Volume Nine Number 11 - December 2007

Meeting at Westside Unitarian Universalist Building 901 Page Ave Ft Worth 7 PM, 2nd Wednesday of each month - Dec. gathering is on the 12th. 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

Treasurer's Report

Reporting date 11/14/07—Beginning date 9/12/07

Beginning Balance	\$2,204.97
Credits	
Redeposit (J.Z. Smith Speaking Fee returned)	\$25.00
Donation/dues Ed Miller	50.00
Donation (Movie night)	28.00
Total Credits	103.00
Debits	
Donation to Westside UU	150.00
Snacks (Movie)	13.93
Office Supplies	2.38
Coffee	3.79
Total Debits	182.70
Net	(79.70)
Ending balance	\$2,125.27

Attest: Dolores Ruhs, Treasurer

There are no minutes reported for the November meeting due to the absence of our secretary

Mohammed had a way with men, but cared little for women.

Mohammed knew that sex would sell very well among the group of his lecherous followers who were motivated to fight battles by the promise of sex, slaves and booty. By constantly emphasizing to his followers that they would get untouched virgins in Paradise, Mohammed is clearly expressing his "high" opinion of the institution of marriage and his fairness to women. Once the followers go to heaven, they can conveniently ditch their wives for the fresher and more pleasurable sexual encounters with

'Houris' (beautiful virgins). Not only that, the poor wives who gave up their virginity for the pleasure of their husbands do not get even one Male Sex partner. But wait, Allah is all merciful! He gives the wives the rare honor of watching their husbands deflower those 72 Houris and 28 young pre-pubescent boys.

O the joy of sodomy!

So now be sodomites, you Arabs.

Turn not away from it--

therein is wondrous pleasure.

Take some coy lad with kiss-curls

twisting on his temple

and ride as he stands like some gazelle

standing to her mate.

A lad whom all can see girt with sword

and belt not like your whore who has

to go veiled.

Make for smooth-faced boys and do your

very best to mount them, for women are

the mounts of the devils

'From Perfumed Garden' by Abu Nuwas

I thought Muslims considered homosexuality an offense punishable by death. Is it okay in Paradise, but not here on earth?

Seems to me, if a man embraces a religion this would be the one. But I do have a question . . . after I deflower the 72 virgins and 28 young boys, what do I do for the rest of eternity? Let's say at sundown each Friday I take another "victim," what do I get after the first two years? Can I skip the young lads and get 28 more virgins or better still, some experienced women? And who gets to frolic with the "used" women. I'd have to have some answers before I became a Muslim. Just my warped mind . . . Pay me no attention . . . Your weird editor.

"According to a special "religious decree" issued by Ayatollah Khomeini, virgin women prisoners must be raped before execution to prevent their going to heaven. A Guard conducts the rape the night before their murder. The next day, the religious judge at the prison issues a marriage certificate and sends it to the victim's family, along with a box of sweets."

Why is a woman who is raped not permitted access to heaven, since she had no control over the event? Why are these people, (and all fundamentalists), so obsessed with virginity?

Atheism and Humanism in a Pluralist Democracy

Edd Doerr, Past President of the American Humanist Association, the head of Americans for Religious Liberty, and the author of Here I Stand.

Christopher Hitchens believes that religion is a poison because it asks humans to surrender the precious faculty of reason in favor of faith where the message of God is accepted without evidence (he believes faith and reason are incompatible), it misrepresents the origins of humanity and the cosmos, it attacks human integrity with an immoral approach to reward and punishment, it fosters servility and solipsism, and it is sexually repressive.

Edd Doerr first explains that he does not favor use of terms like “non-believer” or “atheist” because they suggest what a person is against, but not what he/she is for. He prefers “humanist,” which conveys a belief in reason, science and human equality. He believes that Christopher Hitchens is too broad in his critique of religion. Doerr differentiates between the Religious Right and fundamentalists (of any faith tradition) and more progressive people of faith with whom he joins often in coalitions around certain issues.

Christopher Hitchens puts forward some of the basic creedal teachings of Christianity, and says he cannot find anyone claiming to be Christian who says they actually believe them. Doerr says that most Christians he knows don't think often about elements of the creed; they are more like the Founding Fathers who say they follow the ethical teachings of Jesus.

Hitchens says that the Scriptures or holy texts of various religions do not teach equality, but rather slavery and repression, evidence of their primitive origins. He fears that those with such apocalyptic visions who think God is on their side might some day acquire apocalyptic weapons and destroy the world.

Doerr says that many holy texts are, for example, repressive of women, but some religious people like Bishop. John Shelby Spong leave aside what does not make sense. But he says the Bible may be well sold, but not well read. Polls show that a lot of people can't name the four gospels, and other basics.

Hitchens says that evolution is central in understanding the world today, but people of faith say that God created it all, without evidence. Doerr suggested that that was Jefferson's view. Disagreement ensued.

It became clear that Hitchens and Doerr have a fundamental difference about what “being religious” means. Hitchens says that Jefferson was a Deist; he did not believe that God intervened in human history. Religious people, he says, believe that God does intervene, and has a message for them. Doerr said that that is one view of what it means to be “religious.” Many Unitarians, he said, do not believe in the supernatural, but still call themselves “religious.”

When it comes to the sexual act, both agree that religion has been repressive, but Doerr thinks religion is evolving, especially with the increasing numbers of women in the clergy.

When asked if he would make common cause with people of faith on public issues, Hitchens said that depends on the political views of those involved. But he finds religious people largely useless on the issues important to him. He cites the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, and the fact that most religious people condemned the cartoons as the cause of the violence that ensued after their publication, rather than simply condemning the violence.

Doerr says he has just finished Al Gore's new book, *The Assault on Reason*, and although Gore is a Christian believer, Doerr agrees with a lot of what he says, and asserts, “I can work with a guy like Al Gore.”

Both men share a strong belief in religious freedom and tolerance. Hitchens, who recently became an American citizen, said he has a new slogan based on Jefferson's phrase, the “wall of separation between church and state.” That slogan is: “Mr. Jefferson, build up that wall!” Doerr agrees on separation, and finds that the actions of the Religious Right are a danger to that wall today.

<http://interfaithradio.org/node/199>



In case you missed this sage comment:

"How can there be peace when drunkards, drug dealers, communists, atheists, New Age worshipers of Satan, secular humanists, oppressive dictators, greedy money changers, revolutionary assassins, adulterers, and homosexuals are on top?"- Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, p.227

Oct 29, 2007 Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld fled France today fearing arrest over charges of "ordering and authorizing" torture of detainees at both the American-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the US military's detainment facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, unconfirmed reports coming from Paris suggest.

US embassy officials whisked Rumsfeld away yesterday from a breakfast meeting in Paris organized by the Foreign Policy magazine after human rights groups filed a criminal complaint against the man who spearheaded President George W. Bush's "war on terror" for six years.

Under international law, authorities in France are obliged to open an investigation when a complaint is made while the alleged torturer is on French soil.

According to activists in France, who greeted Rumsfeld shouting "murderer" and "war criminal" at the breakfast meeting venue, US embassy officials remained tight-lipped about the former defense secretary's whereabouts citing "security reasons".

Anti-torture protesters in France believe that the defense secretary fled over the open border to Germany, where a war crimes case against Rumsfeld was dismissed by a federal court. But activists point out that under the Schengen agreement that ended border checkpoints across a large part of the European Union, French law enforcement agents are allowed to cross the border into Germany in pursuit of a fleeing fugitive.

"Rumsfeld must be feeling how Saddam Hussein felt when US forces were hunting him down," activist Tanguy Richard said. "He may never end up being hanged like his old friend, but he must learn that in the civilized world, war crime doesn't pay."

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) along with the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), and the French League for Human Rights (LDH) filed the complaint on Thursday after learning that Rumsfeld was scheduled to visit Paris.

You'll never see Henry Kissinger on French soil for the very same reason. Ed.

Trouble in Texas: School Board Chairman Seeks Religion in Science Class

The Texas Freedom Network (TFN) on Tuesday revealed a side of "intelligent design" proponents rarely seen by the public at large. The group released a transcript and recording of an extraordinarily candid speech given in 2005 by recently named State Board of Education Chairman Ron McLeroy.

McLeroy told a gathering at Grace Bible Church in Bryan, Texas, of his efforts to expunge evolution from the state's high school biology textbooks. "Back in November 2003, we finished [the]...adoption process for the biology textbooks in Texas.... I want to tell you all the arguments made by all the intelligent-design group, all the creationist intelligent design people, I can guarantee the other side heard exactly nothing," he said.

He went on, condemning other Christian board members for not following his lead.

So, step one: lie about your motives; step two: change the definition of science; step three: target the most impressionable among you.

McLeroy's perspective is incredibly dangerous. His effort to replace science with theology has implications not just for Texas, but for school children nationwide. Texas is a major market for textbook publishers because it has so many children in its public system. Therefore, the textbooks available to school districts around the country tend to reflect Texas school officials' choices.

"Whether you're a progressive creationist, recent creationist, young-Earth, old-Earth, it's all in the tent of intelligent design," McLeroy said. "And intelligent design here at Grace Bible Church is actually a smaller tent than you would have in the intelligent design movement as a whole, because we are all Biblical literalists.... So because it's a bigger tent, just don't waste our time arguing with each other about...all of the side issues."

TFN's press release noted that the 2006 school board elections shifted the balance of power, giving McLeroy and his allies a slim majority. The board is slated to revise science standards this school year.

UN Report Highlights Rights of Atheists and the Non-religious

The 2007 annual report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief highlights the rights and concerns of humanists and other nonreligious groups. For the first time, the report includes a whole section devoted to the situation of atheists and other non-theists. The report is written by Asma Jahangir, who was placed under house arrest by the government of Pakistan earlier this week.

I believe that the five page section on the "Situation of persons with atheistic or non-theistic beliefs" will be an extremely valuable tool for current and future campaigners for the rights of the nonreligious. It provides an excellent summary of the relevant international laws and agreements that reference non-theists and the non-religious. It explicitly demonstrates that the guarantee to freedom of "religion or belief" includes "non-theistic and atheistic beliefs" equally with theistic beliefs.

It also raises a raft of problems and concerns that I and other humanist representatives and freethought groups have raised at the UN and elsewhere in recent years.

Humanist concerns addressed in the Special Rapporteur's report to the UN include:

- Atheists' taxes being used to finance religious organizations
- Blasphemy laws
- Obligations to participate in religious worship in schools
- Discriminatory employment practices by faith groups
- Religious exemptions in equality legislation
- Discrimination in faith-based services
- Official consultations with religious leaders that exclude non-religious representatives.

The report also weighs in on the issue of "defamation of religion" which is currently roiling the UN.

Jahangir reiterates the view of humanists and many human rights groups that "criminalizing 'defamation of religions' can be counterproductive, since it may create an atmosphere of intolerance and fear and may even increase the chances of a backlash."

She also notes that, "Accusations of 'defamation of religions' might stifle legitimate criticism or even research on practices and laws appearing to be in violation of human rights but that are, or are at least perceived to be, sanctioned by religion."

When I last met with Jahangir, less than two weeks ago, I thanked her for her focus on people with non-theistic beliefs. She shot me a wry grin and said, "We will see what they do. A lot of people won't like it."

The entire 2007 Annual Report by the Special Rapporteur can be read on the UN Website.

The section on "Situation of persons with atheistic or non-theistic beliefs" has been reprinted on the IHS website http://humaniststudies.org/abstract_asmaToUNGA.html

Holiday Hucksters: Religious Right Cranks Up Another 'War On Christmas' By Bob Boston

Your kids are queasy from eating too much candy, there's a decomposing jack o'lantern on your front stoop and the trees in your back yard are rapidly shedding leaves. Sounds like the time is right for another "War on Christmas" brought to you by the Religious Right!

That's right. These days, the Religious Right doesn't even have the decency to wait until Thanksgiving to start whining about what terms people use to describe the December holidays.

Secondly, over the past year, the Religious Right has shifted the discussion from things like battles over Nativity scenes on public property to the language, decorations and even in-store greetings offered by retailers.

Why are the legal eagles of the Religious Right focusing on what stores do instead of government? Simple. The number of battles over holiday symbols is decreasing. The courts have ruled on this matter *ad nauseum*, and guidelines are in place. Retailers are the new big, fat target for the Religious Right's whiny campaign. The Religious Right needs a new enemy to attack to ensure those dollars flow in and to keep its followers in a constant state of agitation and mock outrage over the latest assaults by the anti-religious fanatics who support church-state separation.

But it's the usual Religious Right con. Most advocates of church-state separation don't spend much time obsessing over what stores are doing or saying in December. When a unit of government takes it upon itself to celebrate the religious aspects of a holiday on everyone's behalf, we have to speak out.

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But the shops down at the mall aren't part of that. They aren't arms of the government. Some say "Christmas" in their ads and some don't. Who cares? The holiday will come either way. (Remember, the Grinch even stole the last can of Who Hash - yet Christmas still came.)

In fact, one could argue that all of the brouhaha at the mall is a distraction from the central message of Christmas. Does the fact that a giant corporation uses the word "Christmas" in its ads truly mean it is interested in marking the birth of Jesus? Chances are, its real goal is persuading you to bust out the credit cards and spend, spend, spend.

It's sad, really. The Religious Right's holier-than-thou brigade claims to treasure Christmas - and then drafts it as cannon fodder in its culture war, spending three months hawking offensive, in-your-face buttons and stickers that make a mockery of a season that is supposed to be dedicated to peace and love. Is that really what Jesus would do?

For those in the Religious Right who genuinely are offended because the newspaper ad from Best Buy fails to include the word "Christmas" and the temporary clerk at the Sears dares to say "Happy Holidays," I have some advice: This Christmas, ask Santa Claus to bring you a life.

Evolution Debate Led to Ouster, Official Says

AUSTIN, Tex., Nov. 29 (AP) — The state's director of science curriculum said she resigned this month under pressure from officials who said she had given the appearance of criticizing the teaching of intelligent design.

The Texas Education Agency put the director, Chris Comer, on 30 days' paid administrative leave in late October, resulting in what Ms. Comer called a forced resignation.

The move came shortly after she forwarded an e-mail message announcing a presentation by Barbara Forrest, an author of "Creationism's Trojan Horse." The book argues that creationist politics are behind the movement to get intelligent design theory taught in public schools. Ms. Comer sent the message to several people and a few online communities.

Ms. Comer, who held her position for nine years, said she believed evolution politics were behind her ousting. "None of the other reasons they gave are, in and of themselves, firing offenses," she said.

Education agency officials declined to comment Wednesday on the matter. But they explained their recommendation to fire Ms. Comer in documents obtained by The Austin American-Statesman through the Texas Public Information Act.

"Ms. Comer's e-mail implies endorsement of the speaker and implies that T.E.A. endorses the speaker's position on a subject on which the agency must remain neutral," the officials said.

The agency documents say that officials recommended firing Ms. Comer for repeated acts of misconduct and insubordination.

The officials said forwarding the e-mail message conflicted with her job responsibilities and violated a directive that she not communicate with anyone outside the agency regarding a pending science curriculum review.

The documents criticize Ms. Comer for giving a presentation and attending an off-site meeting without approval. It also said she had complained that "there was no real leadership at the agency."

The Seductions of Misbelief by Tom Flynn

Odds are, few Free Inquiry readers check their watches and think, "Hmm, it's after five in Amherst, New York - I wonder what Tom Flynn's doing?" Still, for the last couple of years, there's been a reliable answer to that question. I've been spending most of my after-work and weekend hours editing a thumping-big reference book. The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief, soon to be published by Prometheus Books, is designed as the successor to Gordon Stein's groundbreaking 1985 *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief*. It's a comprehensive reference work covering the full spectrum of unbelief, of which secular humanism is a part.

Unbelief is a deliberately generic term, intended to rise above those endless arguments over labels that atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, and secular humanists have among themselves. Of course, Free Inquiry focuses on secular humanism, which we might describe in shorthand as that subset of religious unbelief endowed with the most fully developed cosmic and ethical outlook. Though secular humanists are unbelievers by definition, not all unbelievers are secular humanists. Think of Stalin, or of people you know who espouse the sort of moral nihilism depicted in Woody Allen's films.

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Crimes and Misdemeanors and Match Point.

While editing The New Encyclopedia meant straddling that gap: working as a secular humanist by day, a generic atheist by night. And it prompted the question of whether or why-unbelief matters as a necessary (though admittedly insufficient) component of our secular humanist eupraxsophy.

Does unbelief matter? In my opinion, it matters very much. Americans, religious and otherwise, might disagree, noting that religiosity seems so pervasive and is rapidly expanding in public life. Some Europeans might disagree also, noting that religiosity has shriveled and now seems socially irrelevant outside of Muslim immigrant communities. The very fact that unbelief seems unimportant for opposing reasons-and that merely within the confines of Western culture-should give us pause before we consign unbelief to history's bulging dustbin. True, many of unbelief's most prestigious recent advocates-twentieth-century labor reformers, political revolutionaries, and academic Marxists-have largely melted away. Atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, and old-line freethinkers and anticlericals stand increasingly alone on the barricades of radical reform. Despite these historical developments, the fundamental stance that all unbelievers share-the conviction that the everyday world of matter, energy, and their interactions is either all that exists or all that matters-is inescapably significant.

Consider how important it would be if unbelievers' naturalistic worldview were definitely proven wrong. Imagine for the sake of argument that the core contentions of Christian monotheism were somehow demonstrated to be correct beyond any possibility of question. If the universe really is intentionally designed and the designer knows and cares for each of us-if we truly host immortal souls that will know eternities of ecstasy or pain determined by our behavior during eyeblink sojourns on earth-if this is true, then the knowledge that this is true would be the most important item of knowledge any human being could possess. No scientific discovery, no mathematical theorem, no artistic expression, no secret to success, no avowal of love could ever be as significant as the knowledge that accurately gave us the key to eternity.

But now imagine (as unbelievers hold to be the case) that no conventional theistic worldview is true, but that millions of people still order their lives, allocate their resources, and make decisions as though some form of theism were true. Knowing this is terribly important, too, if for a different reason.

To believing critics, I propose a thought experiment. Suppose for a moment that we unbelievers are correct. Suppose that each human being is nothing more than an accidental and temporary convergence of pattern . . . that nothing is eternal . . . that the only values we can hold authentically are the ones we create and embrace for ourselves. Suppose most of all that this life is the only one that any of us will ever have. If these things are true, then the most important item of knowledge any religious believer could ever possess would be the knowledge that his or her faith is groundless. (From the Council for Secular Humanism Dec, 1, 2007)

http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=flynn_26_6&back=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.secularhumanism.org%2Flib%2Flist.php%3Fpublication%3Dfi

(For more of the article cut and paste the above)

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