



July

2010

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

## Texas Two-Step

On Friday, the meeting of the Texas Board of Education began with a prayer offered by member Cynthia Dunbar, a graduate of Pat Robertson's Regent University. Dunbar prayed "in the name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" on behalf of "a Christian land governed by Christian principles." "I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the Spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses," she said, adding that "I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it."



With the tone properly set, the Board proceeded to give final approval to a new set of standards to be taught in the state's public schools. On a straight-line party vote, the Republican majority decided, among other things, to remove a reference to Thomas Jefferson from history books, replacing him with the study of John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas.

I am all in favor of adding John Calvin to the list. The more students learn about his bigotry, his burning of heretics, and his dumbfounding notions of predestination, the better. His ideas certainly had an impact on New England's Puritans; students should learn about the Massachusetts statute of 1641 providing the death penalty for blasphemy, or, for a lesser offense, mutilation of the tongue. They should also learn about the Massachusetts Calvinists who executed four people in 1659 for the crime of being Quakers.

## The Christian Fascists Are Growing Stronger by Chris Hedges

Tens of millions of Americans, lumped into a diffuse and fractious movement known as the Christian right, have begun to dismantle the intellectual and scientific rigor of the Enlightenment. They are creating a theocratic state based on "biblical law," and shutting out all those they define as the enemy. This movement, veering closer and closer to traditional fascism, seeks to force a recalcitrant world to submit before an imperial America. It champions the eradication of social deviants, beginning with homosexuals, and moving on to immigrants, secular humanists, feminists, Jews, Muslims and those they dismiss as "nominal Christians"—meaning Christians who do not embrace their perverted and heretical interpretation of the Bible. Those who defy the mass movement are condemned as posing a threat to the health and hygiene of the country and the family. All will be purged. (Continued on Page 3)

## From The Chair

Mark Greene, a graduate of the FWISD and UT at Arlington and a long-time political activist in our area will be speaking at our meeting Wednesday evening, the 14th. He will be talking about something that should interest every Humanist, *how to be a more effective citizen for a better world, from activism in the neighborhood level through influencing the election of the President of the U. S.*



Our speaker has been involved in politics since 1988. In 1992 he emerged as the leading figure in Tarrant County in heading up the ballot petition effort of independent presidential candidate Ross Perot. He was so successful that he is credited as a key factor in Bill Clinton's victory over then incumbent President Bush by siphoning votes away from him. Mark is proud of the fact that he ultimately voted for Clinton that year, having come to the conclusion that Ross Perot was an unstable egomaniac incapable of effectively leading the country.

He has remained involved in Democratic Party activities, served again as a precinct chair, assisted in various candidates' campaigns, and fought for the increased influence of grass-roots activists throughout this area. Mark is also involved in supporting the activities of the Coffee Party in Fort Worth which, incidentally, meets in this same church on the second Saturdays of the month at 2 p.m. You are welcome to join this group, too.

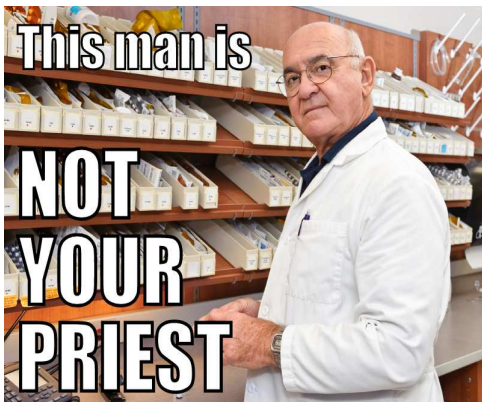
Our program will start with some quotations from outstanding Humanists, continue with Mark's talk and finish with questions, answers, coffee and sweets. Come, bring a friend and share a fun evening with other freethinkers.

Dick Trice, Chair

**"Hey Sarah, how's the Spill doin' for ya, and your drill baby, drill team?"**



Sorry, Just had to say it! Ed.



Pharmacists in four states are allowed to deny women emergency contraception, even to rape victims, if doing so violates their own religious attitudes. Such laws impose one person's particular religion on another person, denying a perfectly legitimate medical service.

Pharmacists should not be able to deny a woman access to valid medical services. It is unconscionable that a trauma such as rape should be compounded by denying access to emergency contraception. That is why you should urge your members of Congress to co-sponsor the Access to Birth Control Act (ABC Act).

Women are not second class citizens. No woman with a valid prescription should be denied treatment because of someone *else's* religion. The ABC Act would stop pharmacies from denying the sale of contraceptives because of a pharmacy employee's religious attitudes. In recent years, women in at least 24 states across the country have reported incidents where they have been denied access to birth control and emergency contraception.

**Pharmacists are employed in the field of medicine, not religion.** They have the right to consider their own religious beliefs in determining what medical decisions they make for their own care. Their religious bias should never override their professional obligation to their customers and patients.

### Reject Michele Bachmann's Sectarian Prayer Amendment, Says Secular Coalition for America

Wed, 05/26/2010 *Last night the Secular Coalition for America and its allies discovered that Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) had introduced an amendment to the National Defense Authorization bill that would allow chaplains in the military to use specifically-Christian prayers at official military events. The Secular Coalition for America unequivocally opposes this measure, and released the following statement:*

The Secular Coalition for America strongly believes that prayers of any kind at official military events are harmful to minority rights, but if chaplains do pray for official events, their prayers should be as inclusive as possible—in keeping with the Constitution and U.S. Supreme Court decisions. Rep. Bachmann's amendment would force the military to change their regulations and allow chaplains to invoke the religious figures of their choice at official military events, including but not limited to graduations and promotion ceremonies.

"The primary function of the military chaplain is to engage in activities designed to meet the religious needs of a pluralistic military community," wrote the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals in 1985, in *Katcoff v Marsh*. Army chaplains were hired to serve military personnel "who wish to use them," the Court observed; they are not authorized "to proselytize soldiers or their families."

## A French Revelation, or The Burning Bush

JAMES A. HAUGHT From the Council for Secular Humanism site [www.secularhumanism.org](http://www.secularhumanism.org)

Incredibly, President George W. Bush told French President Jacques Chirac in early 2003 that Iraq must be invaded to thwart Gog and Magog, the Bible's satanic agents of the Apocalypse.

Honest. This isn't a joke. The president of the United States, in a top-secret phone call to a major European ally, asked for French troops to join American soldiers in attacking Iraq as a mission from God.

Now out of office, Chirac recounts that the American leader appealed to their "common faith" (Christianity) and told him: "Gog and Magog are at work in the Middle East.... The biblical prophecies are being fulfilled.... This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase his people's enemies before a New Age begins."

This bizarre episode occurred while the White House was assembling its "coalition of the willing" to unleash the Iraq invasion. Chirac says he was boggled by Bush's call and "wondered how someone could be so superficial and fanatical in their beliefs."

After the 2003 call, the puzzled French leader didn't comply with Bush's request. Instead, his staff asked Thomas Romer, a theologian at the University of Lausanne, to analyze the weird appeal. Dr. Romer explained that the Old Testament book of Ezekiel contains two chapters (38 and 39) in which God rages against Gog and Magog, sinister and mysterious forces menacing Israel. Jehovah vows to smite them savagely, to "turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws," and slaughter them ruthlessly. In the New Testament, the mystical book of Revelation envisions Gog and Magog gathering nations for battle, "and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them."

In 2007, Dr. Romer recounted Bush's strange behavior in Lausanne University's review, *Allez Savoir*. A French-language Swiss newspaper, *Le Matin Dimanche*, printed a sarcastic account titled: "When President George W. Bush Saw the Prophecies of the Bible Coming to Pass." France's *La Liberte* likewise spoofed it under the headline "A Small Scoop on Bush, Chirac, God, Gog and Magog." But other news media missed the amazing report.

Subsequently, ex-President Chirac confirmed the nutty event in a long interview with French journalist Jean-Claude Maurice, who tells the tale in his new book, *Si Vous le Répétez, Je Démentirai (If You Repeat it, I Will Deny)*, released in March by the publisher Plon.

Oddly, mainstream media are ignoring this alarming revelation that Bush may have been half-cracked when he started his Iraq war. My own paper, *The Charleston Gazette* in West Virginia, is the only U.S. newspaper to report it so far.

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The French revelation jibes with other known aspects of Bush's renowned evangelical certitude. For example, a few months after his phone call to Chirac, Bush attended a 2003 summit in Egypt. The Palestinian foreign minister later said the American president told him he was "on a mission from God" to defeat Iraq. At that time, the White House called this claim "absurd."

Recently, *GQ* magazine revealed that former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attached warlike Bible verses and Iraq battle photos to war reports he hand-delivered to Bush. One declared: "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."

**It's awkward to say openly, but now-departed President Bush is a religious crackpot, an ex-drunk of small intellect who "got saved." He never should have been entrusted with the power to start wars.**

For six years, Americans really haven't known why he launched the unnecessary Iraq attack. Official pretexts turned out to be baseless. Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction after all, and wasn't in league with terrorists, as the White House alleged. Collapse of his asserted reasons led to speculation about hidden motives: Was the invasion loosed to gain control of Iraq's oil—or to protect Israel—or to complete Bush's father's vendetta against the late dictator Saddam Hussein? Nobody ever found an answer.

Now, added to the other suspicions, comes the goofy possibility that abstruse, supernatural, idiotic, laughable Bible prophecies were a factor. This casts an ominous pall over the needless war that has killed more than four thousand young Americans and cost U.S. taxpayers perhaps \$1 trillion.

*James A. Haught is the editor of the Charleston Gazette (West Virginia) and a [FREE INQUIRY](#) senior editor.*

## **Christian Fascists (Continued from Page 1)**

The followers of deviant faiths, from Judaism to Islam, must be converted or repressed. The deviant media, the deviant public schools, the deviant entertainment industry, the deviant secular humanist government and judiciary and the deviant churches will be reformed or closed. There will be a relentless promotion of Christian "values," already under way on Christian radio and television and in Christian schools, as information and facts are replaced with overt forms of indoctrination. The march toward this terrifying dystopia has begun. It is taking place on the streets of Arizona, on cable news channels, at tea party rallies, in the Texas public schools, among militia members and within a Republican Party that is being hijacked by this lunatic fringe.

[Elizabeth Dilling](#), who wrote "The Red Network" and was a Nazi sympathizer, is touted as required reading by trash-talk television hosts like Glenn Beck. Thomas Jefferson, who favored separation of church and state, is ignored in Christian schools and soon will be ignored in Texas public school textbooks.

Those who embrace this movement see life as an epic battle against forces of evil and Satanism.— *Hedges graduated from Harvard Divinity School*

## **Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher To Atheist** by Dan Barker

**After 19 years of evangelical preaching, missionizing, evangelism and Christian songwriting, Dan Barker "threw out the bathwater and discovered there is no baby there."**

Religion is a powerful thing. Few can resist its charms and few can truly break its embrace. It is the siren who entices the wandering traveler with songs of love and desire and, once successful, turns a mind into stone. It is a Venus fly trap. Its attraction is like that of drugs to an addict who, wishing to be free and happy, becomes trapped and miserable.

But the saddest part of the dependency is the fact that most participants are willing victims. They think they are happy. They believe religion has kept its promises and have no desire to search elsewhere. They are deeply in love with their faith and have been blinded by that love--blinded to the point of unquestioning sacrifice.

I know this is true because I was one of Christ's disciples for over nineteen years, and my subsequent self-excision was/is traumatically painful.

My Dad was a professional musician during the 1940's. At one of his concerts he met a female vocalist and, as things go, they went (lucky for me). They got married and, when I was a toddler, they both found true religion. Dad threw away his collection of original Glenn Miller recordings (ouch!), turned his back on his former "sinful" life and enrolled in seminary to become a minister. He didn't finish because of the strong demands of raising three boys. But he lived his faith through his family and through lay ministry in local churches.

My folks' spirituality was so strong that they often found it hard to find a church that met their needs. So we church-hopped for many years. I can't remember all the churches, but we were Baptists, Methodists, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, fundamentalist, evangelical, "Bible-believing" and charismatic.

For a number of years we formed a family musical team and ministered in many Southern California churches--nothing fantastic--Dad played trombone and preached, Mom sang solos, I played piano, my brothers tooted various instruments and we all joined in singing those famous gospel harmonies. It was a neat experience for us kids. My childhood was filled with love, fun and purpose. I felt truly fortunate to have been born into the "truth" and at the age of fifteen I committed myself to a lifetime of Christian ministry.

My commitment lasted nineteen years. It gave my life a feeling of purpose, destiny and fulfillment. I spent years trekking across Mexico in missionary work--small villages, jungles, deserts, large arenas, radio, television, parks, prisons and street meetings. (Continued on page 4)

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I was a "doer of the word and not a hearer only." I went to a Christian college, majored in Religion/Philosophy, became ordained and served in a pastoral capacity in three California churches. I personally led many people to Jesus Christ, and encouraged many young people to consider full-time Christian service.

I served for a while as librarian for Kathryn Kuhlman's Los Angeles choir, observing the "miracles" first-hand. I was even instrumental in a few healings myself.

For a number of years I directed the "King's Children," a local Christian music group that performed quite extensively including a brief term of hosting a local Christian television show.

For fifteen years I worked with Manuel Bonilla, the leading Christian recording artist in the Spanish-speaking world. I was his main producer/arranger, and working with him gave me the opportunity to learn the skills to produce many more Christian albums. I have written more than a hundred Christian songs which are either published or recorded by various artists, and two of my children's musicals continue to be best sellers around the world. ("Mary Had A Little Lamb," a Christmas musical, and "His Fleece Was White as Snow," for Easter, both published and distributed by Manna Music. You can see the religious symbolism: Christ, the unspotted lamb of god who became the final sacrifice for sin.)

I could go on listing my Christian accomplishments, but I think you can see that I was very serious about my faith, and that I am quite capable of analyzing religion from the inside out, including some of my own.

Last Friday evening I directed a bible study in my own home. I opened it to all comers and announced that I would welcome all points of view with the purpose of examining the documents with skepticism rather than faith. The eight people who arrived (to my astonishment) were Christians who had been informed of my present atheistic stance and were curious about my intentions. My closest ally was my brother, a theistic agnostic [Darrell is now an activist freethinker]. One fellow, a theologian, informed me that his purpose in coming was to convert me back to the faith. (He failed.)

### **From Fundamentalist to Humanist by Robert Price**

Everyone is on a spiritual journey. Most of the time we are glad enough to admit this, but other times we want stability more than anything else, and at those times we are liable to fear religious change lest we fall away from hard-won truth. But I have come to believe that the spiritual journey is a journey of discovery into largely unknown territory. If we hunker down, insisting we've already got enough truth, thank you, we are like the Israelites stubbornly camping out on the threshold of the Promised Land, cheating themselves out of the fulfillment of their hopes. My own spiritual journey has taken me places I never thought I'd be going. But I'm glad it did! I trod a rocky but fascinating road from fundamentalism to humanism. Let me share some of the high points with you. Perhaps you have been over some of the same territory. Or perhaps you will.

At the ripe old age of ten (adolescence being the most common time of life for conversion, psychologists tell us), I began to fear the prospect of everlasting hell-fire and heeded the urging of the preacher at a local Baptist church to receive Jesus Christ as my personal savior. Unlike Huck Finn, who was back playing cards, smoking and cussing the next week, I took the whole thing quite seriously. It was not long before I broke open the Bible and began studying it, "witnessing" to friends and neighbors about my new-found faith, praying, and attending church at least three times a week. I loved the camaraderie of "Christian fellowship" and, while less enthusiastic about it since I knew what a nut I must seem, I persevered in witnessing and persuaded several friends to "get saved," too.

After some time, I began to see that the fundamentalist "born-again" mentality was not all it was cracked up to be. The born-again gospel promises joy and peace of mind, but it does so by prolonging childhood ("unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven"). Fundamentalism fills you with answers before you even think to ask the questions. It discourages self-discovery and urges you to conform to a supposedly "Christ-like" stereotype. Your mind is made up for you, and a set of pre-packaged values and opinions are supplied you, like a uniform and field pack in Basic Training.

But I did find Liberal theology to be quite helpful. Paul Tillich especially answered my questions. Here was a faith that did not require intellectual fudging and self-deception. One could be genuinely open to the evidence since "faith," Tillich argued, was not "belief," but rather "Ultimate Concern." Wrestling with the questions, not necessarily parroting the "right" answers to them. I believed one can experience the Holy, but not necessarily a personal God. No miracles, either. Who needed them? No more theologically important than UFOs or ESP. The Bible was mythical, but that was good, not bad. Myths give us symbols. Symbols become rituals. And as Carl Jung showed, rituals are psychologically and spiritually profound, even though there's nothing magical about them. This is where I had arrived by the time I'd finished my Ph.D. in Theology at Drew University in 1981.

The same year I discovered an unusual Baptist church which combined serious discipleship with open-minded theology. It felt great to be back in a spiritual community. But three years later I moved to North Carolina where I taught Bible and Religion at a Baptist college. While there, I started attending the Episcopal Church and came to love the liturgical life of the church. I still had a pretty left-wing theology, but my piety had become rather traditional.

I taught for four years until my Baptist church back in New Jersey called me as its new pastor. Back up among the Yankees! I viewed the ministry as a high calling and privilege. But soon I found myself seduced again into academics. I enrolled in a second Ph.D. program at Drew, this time in New Testament (graduating in 1993). Almost immediately, my newfound piety began to chafe. My scalpel of critical reasoning, newly honed and applied to the biblical text, made it hard for me to restrain my old skepticism. About this time I also began to read extensively in radical postmodern philosophy. Unfortunately for me, my congregation had been getting more traditional while I was getting more radical! We had a bitter parting of the ways, and the church split. (Continued on page 5)

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As pastor of my own unofficial Universalist church, meeting in my home, I had come to view religion simply as a matter of spiritual experience. "God" was mainly part of the language of worship, not necessarily anything more. But that was enough. As long as religion offered a unique, special kind of experience, that was all that mattered. I was teaching Religious Studies at Bergen Community College at this time, and I would discuss this theory, that religion offered a kind of spirituality that could not be simply reduced to moral conscience or to a set of beliefs. But then I began to think that, no, the way I understood religion, it wasn't even unique. It was really a kind of esthetic experience. Worship was something akin to the awe we feel at great art or at beholding the starry sky. Poetry could offer essentially the same, genuinely spiritual experience. Religion came to seem to me basically a matter of drama and theater. That is not to denigrate it. Rather, to see it as theatrical is to explain why it is so powerful, like an engrossing film or play that leaves the viewer changed.

But this meant that religion is nothing more than a creation of human imagination. As such it still fascinates me. Some theologians believe the same things I do but feel the need to remain a part of it. They feel that being a Christian is part of their identity, and that they need not give it up, only "demythologize" it. I felt this way for quite a while. But at length I realized I was kidding myself. I realized I do not esteem Jesus as any greater a teacher than Aristotle or Epicurus. I guess I agree more with Nietzsche than with Jesus. So what's the point? As for the artistic, theatrical dimension of the thing, I find my imagination enriched, my soul nourished, by the arts. I look to philosophy for a deeper understanding of the world. Religion now seems to me a kind of nursery school version of philosophy.

The Bible continues to fascinate me. I teach it in college and graduate school, though now it seems as bizarre to "believe" the Bible as it would be to "believe" the Iliad or Hamlet!

**I have abandoned the ministry, though I have not abandoned my friends who left the church with me. We still meet often and call ourselves "Heretics Anonymous." We discuss ideas. We figure there is at least as much spirituality in questions as in answers. And that's good, since we find we have a lot more questions than answers.**

## Lying About the Gaza Flotilla Disaster

by M J Rosenberg

It's been one lie after another in the US media about the Israeli attack on the Gaza-bound relief flotilla. No matter that the *Israeli media* views the whole incident as a debacle for Israel, in this country the Israel-can-do-no-wrong crowd is on overdrive defending the operation. As usual, facts don't matter to them.— Except they do.

The first thing you need to know about the Gaza flotilla disaster is

that the intention of the activists on board the ships was to break the Israeli blockade. Delivering the embargoed goods was incidental.

In other words, the activists were like the civil rights demonstrators who sat down at segregated lunch counters throughout the South and refused to leave until they were served. Their goal was not really to get breakfast. It was to end segregation.

That fact is so obvious that it is hard to believe that the "pro-Israel" lobby is using it as an indictment.

*Of course* the goal of the flotilla was to break the blockade. *Of course* Martin Luther King provoked the civil authorities of the South to break segregation. *Of course* the Solidarity movement used workers' rights as a pretext to break Soviet-imposed Communism.

The bottom line is that the men and women of the flotilla had every right to attempt to destroy an illegal blockade that Israel had no legal standing to impose and which was designed to inflict collective punishment on the people of Gaza.

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