

Humanist CommonSense

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA

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A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION (AHA) AND AN AFFILIATE OF THE COUNCIL FOR SECULAR HUMANISM (CSH)



**Return of Annual HAWCF
Winter Solstice Meeting
MT. FUJI STEAKHOUSE
December 15 at 7 pm
Program: 2009—The
Good, The Bad & The Ugly
2010 Board Election
See Map on page 3**

AS WE SAY GOODBYE TO THE 2009 Year of Science, we meet for a year-end Solstice celebration at **Mt. Fuji Steakhouse**, 2607 South Florida Avenue, Lakeland, in the Southgate Shopping Center, between Pablo and Oak streets. **See map on page 3.**

Dinner will be partially subsidized from the HAWCF treasury: you pay \$5.00 per person ... HAWCF picks up the rest!



At the dinner, simply give your check of \$5.00 per person to Portia or Jim Kroll. HAWCF will pay the restaurant—including the gratuity! (Beer and wine are your responsibility.)

Continue to page 3 to read about the program and the slate for the election.

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Faith Healing Can Kill

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

[Dr. Williamson, a member of our chapter and longtime Humanist advocate, is a retired cardiologist and currently lives in Orlando. Editor of a magazine for physicians, CENTRAL FLORIDA PHYSICIAN, he has contributed articles to various freethought publications and regularly submits letters to the ORLANDO SENTINEL. He served on the boards of Humanists of Florida and Atheists of Florida. E-mail: jwingw@aol.com]

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS CAN SEEM BIZARRE or even humorous to non-believers, but there is nothing funny about parents using faith healing as a substitute for modern medicine. Using faith healing as the only measure to treat a sick child can lead to preventable deaths. Consideration of two high-profile cases from 2008 can demonstrate the perils and give insight into the thinking of the parents.

Ava Worthington, the 15-month old daughter of Carl and Raylene Worthington of Oregon City, Oregon, developed an acute illness that was described by the father: Ava came down with what appeared to be

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Honoring our Veterans

By Robert P. Tucker, Ph.D.

[Dr. Tucker, a founding member of our chapter, received his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Chicago. He was chair of the Dept. of Religion and Philosophy, Yankton College, Yankton, SD, and former professor of Philosophy and Bible at Florida Southern College, Lakeland.]

REMEMBER THESE WORDS?

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitles them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

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CALENDAR

Dec 2009–Mar 2010

December 15	Annual Meeting and Solstice Celebration
January 11	Humanist Dinner
January 19	Regular Meeting
February 8	Humanist Dinner
February 16	Regular Meeting
March 8	Humanist Dinner
March 16	Regular Meeting

Heresy in Lakeland

AT 10 AM SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1—All Saints' Day as observed in some Christian traditions—an atheist billboard advertisement went up in Lakeland. For about the next eight weeks, eastbound drivers on West Memorial Boulevard will be looking at the very old question—does God exist.

Displayed against a cloud-strewn skyscape are the words “Don’t believe in God? You are not alone.” The only advertising on the sign is a listing of the Web site of Atheists of Florida—www.AtheistsofFlorida.org—the organization that paid for the message.

The second such billboard in the state, it is part of a bolder public strategy on the part of atheist, humanist and other “freethought” organizations nationwide to promote themselves and combat religious entanglements in government.

Rob Curry, president of the Tampa-based Atheists of Florida, said his organization purchased the billboard message (costing \$2,000 for 75 days) because it has established a new chapter in Lakeland and wants to encourage people to join.

“... to celebrate, we decided to use Lakeland as a venue. One of the things we find is that when other atheists become aware we exist, they say, ‘Wow, I wish I knew this before.’”

Upon confirmation the billboard was up, an Atheists of Florida press release went out to the media. Following are the early media reactions

Monday, November 2:

- Tbo.com, an on-line edition of *The Tampa Tribune*, features the story “Atheist group takes message to Lakeland via billboard” (<http://www2.tbo.com/content/2009/nov/02/021442/atheist-group-takes-message-lakeland-billboard/>) as a breaking news story online. 23 pages of comments to this story follow.
- WFLA News Channel 8 is the first local TV news broadcaster to break the story: “Controversial Atheist Billboards” (<http://www2.tbo.com/video/>

2009/nov/02/controversial-atheist-billboards65160/)

- Also on the net, the story is highlighted on examiner.com: “Atheists of Florida purchase billboard and invite the public” (<http://www.examiner.com/x-19674-Tampa-Humanism-Freethought-Examiner-y2009m11d2-Atheists-of-Florida-purchase-billboard-and-invite-the-public>), portrayed the image of the billboard (see photo above).



Tuesday

- Surfacing on the front page of *The Tampa Tribune*: “Atheists take message on road” (<http://www2.tbo.com/content/2009/nov/03/na-atheists-take-message-on-road/>). That’s right—Page 1A! Basically the same as the online version (story #1)
- Local TV news broadcast: “Billboard supporting Atheism upsets some Lakeland drivers” ABC Action News (http://www.abcactionnews.com/news/local/story/Billboard-supporting-Atheism-upsets-some-Lakeland-_mpBHsRgpE2-fpXHhZODYA.csp). Over 220 online comments were posted in response
- The *Lakeland Ledger* publishes “Honk If You Don’t Believe in God” (<http://www.theledger.com/article/20091106/NEWS/911065049/1326?Title=Honk-If-You-Don-t-Believe-in-God>).

Further reactions:

- Bay News 9 and 10Connects recorded interviews for local airing.
- An online webcast featured “Billboard Buzz” (Atheist Forum webcast ... <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/atheist/2009/11/03/Atheist-Forum-HATE-THE-BILLBOARD>) as an episode of their weekly live call-in show, discussing some of the issues raised.
- On his on-line blog, an Orlando area preacher posted “Confessions of a Christian Cleric ... I like Atheists!” (<http://jthelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/11/confessions-of-christian-cleric-i-like.html>

Local responses:

According to the *Lakeland Ledger*, local reaction largely has been low-key. Pastors of the Lakeland Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (composed of predominantly black churches) discussed their response. The Rev. Alex Harper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Institutional, said he was not really surprised by the billboard: “In our society today, there are a lot of things going on, even within the Christian movement, that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible. And they have the right to do that. Of course, we have the right to preach and teach the Christian life. I don’t think it will profit us anything to engage in any confrontation ... We need to be what we are rather than get in a debate with atheists.”

The article continued with a quote from the Rev. Arthur Johnson Sr., pastor of St. Luke’s Ministries a few blocks away: “Satan only feeds on recognition. They have the right to say they don’t believe, just like I have the right to say I believe in God. I disagree with them. I think it’s sad it’s gotten to that point,” he said. He said the billboard might serve as a wake-up call for Lakeland churches, “They don’t offend me. I’m going to preach the gospel anyway.”

Follow-up:

On Monday Nov 23, the Atheists of Florida hosted a *Meet an Atheist* event in Lakeland which, according to Humanist activist Jennifer Hancock, went quite well. No death threats were made and almost all of the 46 persons present behaved quite civilly.

The event was scheduled to give an opportunity to residents of Lakeland to ask questions and voice any opinions they might have about the non-believing billboard erected there.

Hancock reports the most interesting thing to come out of the event was that members of the religious community came out to support the atheists’ right to speak and to engage in a positive dialogue. Though a group led by Lakeland pastor, Dr. Byron George, attended the meeting to convert the atheists, they did not succeed.

One participant said that, though the billboard did not offend him personally, God was offended.

Humanists Push for Godless Holidays

AS AMERICANS GEAR UP FOR THE HOLIDAYS, they fine-tune wish lists, dig out unfortunate Christmas sweaters and brace for the onslaught of holiday advertising campaigns. This year adds a new contender to the long list of groups vying for attention, and it comes with a twist. The American Humanist Association launched its first nationwide "godless holiday campaign." Its slogan: "No God? ... No Problem!"

The ads, showing smiling people in Santa hats, appeared first on Washington, D.C., buses and subway trains over Thanksgiving weekend. In early December the campaign expands to Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago.

Humanism is a philosophy that says people don't need the framework of an organized religion or belief in a supernatural deity to live morally. Humanists believe people should lead their lives in a way that benefits society at large. Or, as some of the ads put it: "Be Good for Goodness' Sake."

The American Humanist Association, based in Washington, D.C., promotes humanism and advocates for a secular government. Executive Director Roy Speckhardt said one purpose of the ad campaign is to build aware-

ness of the humanist movement among people who don't already belong to a specific religion.

"We want to change the way people think and talk about nontheists, to pave the way for acceptance of humanism as a valid and positive philosophy of life," he said in a statement.



Similar ads have appeared in the United States before, and not without controversy.

Earlier this month, a Cincinnati billboard sponsored by the United Coalition of Reason was taken down after the billboard company received threats. The ad showed a blue sky with white clouds and the words, "Don't believe in God? You are not alone." It was

later put up at a different location.

A similar story played out earlier this year in Iowa when ads sponsored by the Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers were temporarily removed from Des Moines buses after the transit authority got complaints.

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority said it based its decision on an agency policy against allowing the word "God" in promotional materials. The ads were later put back up.

Speckhardt said he hopes the godless holiday campaign reaches people who fear prejudice because they do not belong to a traditional faith.

It's a group that's rapidly expanding. In 2008, one in five people in the U.S. did not claim a religious identity, according to a survey conducted by Trinity College.

"The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion," according to the survey's Web site.

Humanists are not out to cause a stir with their ads, Speckhardt said. "Of course, it's obvious that many people are also good with a belief in God. So I hope we can all find common ground."

Read this article online at <http://www.sphere.com/2009/11/23/humanists-push-for-godless-holidays/>

Celebration and Election

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The Program

The program will feature a return of our much-loved annual discussion of **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly** from the current year. Believe it or not, there's as much or more good in 2009 than there is bad or ugly.

However, beyond the program, this is an occasion for socializing and just enjoying humanist fellowship.

Nominating committee slate of candidates

This celebration meeting also serves as our HAWCF annual meeting highlighted by **Election of the 2010 HAWCF Board.**

For President: Incumbent Portia Westerfield;

For Vice-President: Incumbent Jim Kroll;
For Secretary: Incumbent Orrinna Speese;

For Co-Treasurers: Al and Jane Eskenazi;

For members-at-large: Daniel Whitt and Incumbent Ron Maslyk;

For Newsletter Editor: Incumbent Nan Owens

Any HAWCF member may nominate additional candidate(s) (including him/herself) for the Board by contacting Portia at 863-425-3968 or portiap@tampabay.rr.com During the meeting itself, nominations from the floor are allowed provided the nominated person agrees to serve.

Come and enjoy this important Gala on December 15 — we look forward to seeing you!.

Regards from Portia!



Honoring Our Veterans

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That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such Government...

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States...

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor." [2:835-7]

These words are part of the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, signed by 56 colonial representatives, and announced to the world on July 4, 1776 from "Independence Hall," in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Our great nation was born in revolution! The cause of freedom-from-tyranny eventuated in a call-to-arms. A terrible struggle ensued. But out of the ashes of that conflagration a noble phoenix arose: the United States of America, our homeland, a bastion of democracy, and a source of inspiration and hope for the rest of the world.

According to historians Will and Ariel Durant, during the last 3,400 years of humanity's written history,

only 168 years have passed with no recorded wars! [7:359] Even within the relatively brief lifetime of our own nation, Americans have been called to arms to fight in 10 major wars: the Revolutionary War (1775-83), the War of 1812 (1812-15), the Mexican War (1846-48), the Civil War (1861-1866), the Spanish-American War ((1898), World War I (April 6, 1917-Nov. 11, 1918), World War II (Dec. 7, 1941-Dec. 31, 1946), the Korean War (1950-53), the Vietnam War (1964-1973) and the Persian Gulf War (1991)—and now we are fighting the "War on Terror."

The sad truth is that human beings have not yet discovered paradise; we have not yet created utopia; and we have not, in this life, become residents of Heaven.

The inevitable consequences are that disagreements among nations arise, aggressors overstep their borders, and defense against hostile foreign forces is an unavoidable necessity. To that end, nations maintain standing armed forces, capable of militarily providing the security their people demand and deserve. The United States is no different: it has about one and a half million men and women of every race and every creed serving in uniform, on active duty, throughout the world. [16:222f.]

In addition, there are over 24 million veterans now living as civilians; and of these over 18 million have served their country in time of war, often at great, even mortal danger to themselves. [16:224]

Some of these patriots are members in every chapter of the American Humanist Association including this one. If you are one of them, you deserve recognition and appreciation from the rest of us for your contribution to making our lives safer and freer than they otherwise would be. Please consider this article one of the small ways in which we pause to honor you.

Of our veterans, we must say that it is due in large part to their bravery, dedication, and hard-work that our nation received its birth and that it has continued to endure for more than two centuries. Certainly nothing could be more appropriate than for

us to annually set aside some sacred time in which we honor and remember colonial their service and sacrifice.

December 7 is such a sacred time. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt explained why in a message to Congress. In words we should never forget, he said: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of American was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." [1:649:19] Their target was the American base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Since that time, it has always been appropriate for us to stop and remember our veterans who suffered and died during that attack, as well as the many other members of our armed forces who fought and helped win what came to be called the Second World War. As (former) President Calvin Coolidge said, "The nation which forgets its defenders will be itself forgotten." [12:56]

Veterans come in all shapes and sizes. Their variety is endless. So too is the diversity of memories they have about their service, and we have about them.

Naturally, hardship, tragedy and death are among our strongest memories: as if military discipline were not enough of a burden to Americans, accustomed as we are to the relatively chaotic freedom of civilian life, many veterans will tell you that, second only to their fear of dying, the most difficult aspect of wartime service is the boredom, the feeling of limbo so far away from home, the dread of receiving bad news and being unable to do anything about it, the weight of loneliness in the midst of other lonely people. All of these things are part of the alienation of war. [12:IV, 56]

Echoing these sentiments, Confederate General Robert E. Lee wrote in a letter to his wife (1862): "What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends; and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted for us in the world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this

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Honoring Our Veterans

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beautiful world.” [15:1044]

The same feeling was shared by Union General William Tecumseh Sherman who said: “I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded, who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell.” [15:1044]

The high cost of war to Americans can be tabulated in so many ways. The dollar amounts alone are staggering: \$140 million for the American Revolution; \$140 billion for the Vietnam War; and \$360-billion for World War II. [4:163]

But the greatest cost has always been in the lives of those who have given, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, “the last full measure of devotion.” [12:IV, 56] The number of Americans killed during ten major wars reaches just beyond the one million mark. [3:227] This is not to deny that some other nations have suffered much greater numerical losses. But that fact does not at all diminish the terrible burden of grief we bear for our own fallen comrades.

War is certainly “hell.” We can’t change that, and we should never forget it. But, thanks to our indomitable human spirit and the precociousness of our American character, sometimes our veterans have also been able to say: “War is heck!” The ability to laugh, even in the face of danger, is one of the greatest survival skills we possess. For over 200 years it has served our military very well. It, too, ought to be remembered on Pearl Harbor Day. Toward that goal, let me jog your memories with these brief tidbits:

From the Korean War you may recall remarks such as these which emerged from dark and desperate situations: “We’ve got the enemy on our right flank, our left flank, in front of us, and behind us. They won’t get away this time!” reported Marine General Lewis Puller. [12:I, 25] “Retreat hell! We’re just advancing in another direction,” explained Marine General O.P. Smith, [12:I, 25]

Ask a veteran how different life in the service is compared to civilian life, and you may hear a story like this one from the Civil War: As 6-foot, 4-inch tall President Abraham Lincoln, complete with black stove-pipe hat, was conducting a tour of Union forces, the Confederate Army suddenly attacked. Seeing his commander-in-chief fully exposed to the fire of enemy muskets, Lieutenant Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., screamed at Lincoln: “Get down, you fool!” Later, as Lincoln was leaving, he bade farewell to the future Supreme Court justice by saying: “Goodbye, Capt. Holmes. I’m glad to see you know how to talk to a civilian!” [5:359]

Then there is this apocryphal story which has, nevertheless, probably taken place in some form in every war America has ever fought: An excited army recruit asked his company commander for an immediate furlough. His wife was going to have a baby. Permission was granted, and when the soldier was about to leave, his officer asked exactly when the baby was due. “About 9 months after I get home, Sir,” replied the recruit! [8:149f.]

In a related vein, you might hear a story like this: Two gray-haired residents of a veterans’ old folks’ home were reminiscing about their World War One experiences in France. Billy remarked: “Remember them pills they give us so we wouldn’t chase the French girls?” “Sure do,” Jake replied, “And, you know, I think they’re beginning to work, too!” [13:459]

Pearl Harbor Day might seem to be an occasion to be observed only by some people, and not by others. The truth is, however, that all of us ought to observe Pearl Harbor Day as we should Veterans’ Day and Memorial Day. Even if we, personally, were not involved in fighting the Second World War, the chances are great that someone we know and love was; and, in any case, the events of December 7, 1941 have already profoundly affected our lives. That means Pearl Harbor Day can and must be a day for us, too.

There are, of course, innumerable issues that cry out for discussion: Is any war ever ethically justifiable?

How is the biblical commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” to be interpreted? [Ex. 20:13] What response should we give to military atrocities such as the Abu Ghraib? Why would a former general and ex-president warn us about a so-called “military-industrial-complex”? Having reluctantly, but successfully integrated blacks and women into the military, how should we now deal with gays in the military? What attitude should we take in relation to conscientious objectors? Should a draft be re-instated to “democratize” military service, or is the all-volunteer approach best?

There are two other issues I hope we would think about whenever the topic of veterans arises. They are: patriotism and peace.

Patriotism has gone out of fashion for some. It was not that way in our past, and maybe it won’t be in our future, if only we remind ourselves that, as Theodore Roosevelt once said, patriotism “is a pious and honorable duty.” [15:720]

Patriotism is best learned from the masters who have actually practiced it. For that reason, I encourage anyone pondering patriotism to study the biographies of famous American veterans. Learn *what* they did, *why* they did it, and *how* they spoke about this country they loved. If this seems too trite an exercise for you, then do it for and with your children or grandchildren for they may not yet have learned all the lessons of responsible citizenship that you already know so well!

One such individual you might try could be the U.S. Revolutionary spy, Nathan Hale who, just before he was hanged by the British in 1776, is reputed to have said: “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” [5:262]

President John F. Kennedy might be someone else to consider. A sailor in the Pacific during World War II, Kennedy gained fame after a Japanese destroyer rammed his ship, forcing him and his comrades to swim to a nearby island. Kennedy humorously dismissed his “hero” celebrity by saying, “It was involuntary. They sank my boat,” [5:326f.] Nevertheless, he

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went on to serve in the U.S. Congress and as President of the United States until his assassination in 1963.

Hear again these words from his presidential inaugural address, and see if not at least a little tingle of patriotic fever caresses your spine:

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first [American] Revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans, born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today, at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge—and more!...

Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though embattled we are; but [as] a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, “rejoicing in hope, “patient in tribulation”; a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself....

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country! [2:855f.]

As for peace: “The mere absence of war is not peace.” So said the very same man, John F. Kennedy. [12:IV, 10] As true as that certainly is, it is also true, as our first American president, George Washington, recognized: “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.” [11:485]

Being prepared for war to preserve the peace... Fighting wars to regain the peace... Both of these activities involve the creation, the training, the support, the hard work, and the sacrifice—sometimes even unto death—of men and women we call “veterans.”

Without them, this nation would not have been born. Without them, this nation will not long survive. Without them, there is no peace.

You and I owe our lives and our liberty to such veterans.

As we pause to observe Pearl Harbor Day, let us—to paraphrase the words of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: rededicate ourselves to the unfinished work for which so many veterans have fought and died. Let us highly resolve that they shall not have served or perished in vain, and let us consecrate ourselves to seeing to it that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, so that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth. [2:853]

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US Catholic Bishops: Scared of School Atheist Clubs?

By Austin Cline,

Excerpted from Austin's Atheism Blog [http://atheism.about.com/].

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OCTOBER 2009—THE GROWTH OF ATHEISM in America, especially among young people, is having an impact. When it comes to religious leaders, that impact appears to be fear—or at least strong worry.

Thus this interview of Chicago's Cardinal Francis George (president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) with John L. Allen Jr. of the *National Catholic Reporter*. The interview covered a lot of issues including atheism, and Cardinal George is not at all happy about atheism—especially the spread of atheism clubs at high schools.

REPORTER: You're talking about Samuel Harris, Richard Dawkins, and so on?

CARDINAL GEORGE: Yes. In Chicago, we now have atheist clubs in high schools. We didn't have those five years ago. Kids I would have confirmed in the eighth grade, by the time they're sophomores in high school say they're atheists. They don't just stop going to church, they make a statement. I think that's new. That's perhaps a bit more like Europe [Source: *National Catholic Reporter*].

Yes, it is new—indeed the only “new” thing about so-called “New” Atheism: people are responding to it, considering it, and taking it seriously. The arguments aren't really new. There's nothing different about the “tone” either—despite so many complaints, people like Dawkins and Harris are arguably kinder and gentler than Madalyn Murray O'Hair. Atheism hasn't changed because it doesn't amount to more than disbelief in gods. There just isn't much to change in that.

What's changed is that traditional religion has lost a lot more respect and credibility than in previous eras. Some of this is general, with so many churches trying to hold the line against equal

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a cold or the flu on a Tuesday. By Saturday, her breathing became labored and the family turned to its traditional faith-healing rituals, praying, fasting, anointing the body with oil, administering diluted wine, and laying on of hands. By Sunday, the father said, he thought there was "a possibility" his daughter was so sick she could die. Then, after a final session of laying on of hands at about 5 PM "she perked up," he said. She grabbed her bottle and "took some food." "She was peaceful; she was rested," Worthington said. Two hours later Ava was dead. The date of her death was March 2, 2008.

The Worthingtons are members of the Followers of Christ, an independent church with roots in Pentecostalism, whose members rely completely on faith-healing and reject all forms of medical treatment. In fact, those who seek medical help are often shunned.

After Ava's death, detectives Michelle Finn and James Rhodes of the Clackamas County Sheriff Office's child-abuse unit elicited detailed information about the parents' religious beliefs with pointed questions. The father said no one in his immediate family has ever been to a doctor or used prescription or over the counter medicine. "It's not something we believe in," he stated. Mr. Worthington said he had ultimate responsibility for Ava's care. "I'm the head of the house; it falls to me. The wife follows the husband." His wife did not dispute the decision to rely on spiritual healing, he said. Asked if she would have taken Ava to a doctor if she knew her child was dying, the wife replied, "I don't know."

The husband stated, "I did everything I could do for her. What I was doing was working. She was getting relief. Dr. Christopher Young, the deputy state medical examiner, who conducted the girl's autopsy, disagreed. "The absence of action led to her death," he said. The autopsy revealed the cause of death was pneumonia, but a chronic condition was also found. She had a softball-size cyst in her neck, a benign cyst hygroma, that was first noted by the family a few months after birth and that gradually

enlarged, pressing on her trachea and esophagus. The pressure on her trachea caused shortness of breath and interfered with drainage from the lungs, predisposing her to pneumonia. The pressure on her esophagus interfered with swallowing, which led to weight loss and weakness. Her size and weight at death was similar to that of a six month old, rather than a fifteen month old. The cyst could have been removed surgically when it was first noted and could have been drained in the acute situation with a needle and syringe. The pneumonia could have been treated with antibiotics. Ava was buried in their church cemetery, where at least 21 people since the 1950s died of medically treatable conditions, according to an investigation by *The Oregonian* in 1998.

Oregon brought suit against the parents charging manslaughter and criminal mistreatment. The wife was cleared of both charges, and the husband was cleared of manslaughter but was convicted of criminal mistreatment only, a misdemeanor. The father was sentenced to 60 days in jail and 5 year's probation.

In the second case, Madeline Kara Neumann, a pretty, active, and apparently healthy 11 year old girl, gradually and progressively showed evidence of a serious illness. She had weight loss and weakness accompanied by loss of appetite, thirst, drinking large quantities of water, urinating frequently in copious amounts, and finally slipped into a coma. Kara died, ironically, on Easter Sunday, April 13, 2008. An autopsy revealed that she died of diabetic keto-acidosis, a condition that is easily treated with insulin and intravenous fluids.

Kara's parents, Dale and Leilani Neumann, ran a small business in Weston, Wisconsin named Monkey Mo Coffee Shop. Beyond the mission of delivering caffeine, the shop served as a meeting place for a small group of people that shared beliefs in Pentecostal Christianity, which emphasized faith healing and certainty of a looming Apocalypse. The Neumanns were readers of and occasional contributors to a website called "Unleavened Bread Ministries," operated by David Ells, a self-appointed preacher

in Pensacola, Florida. The website is replete with testimonials about miraculous cures and predictions of impending doom.

It was 3:45 in the afternoon on Easter Sunday when Marathon County Medical Examiner John Larson was called to St. Clare's Hospital emergency room in Weston, just outside Wausau, to investigate Kara's death. Larson asked what funeral home they preferred. The parents replied, "We won't need one. She will be alive tomorrow." Larson informed the parents that an autopsy would be performed, to which they responded, "You won't need to do that. She will be alive by then."

Despite the pleas of friends and relatives during Kara's illness to seek medical care, the parents resolutely refused, saying that Kara's body was a battleground in a spiritual war between Jesus Christ and forces of Hell. Only by resisting worldly medicine, they believed, could she be saved. The day before Kara's death, her mother said, "We stayed by her side nonstop and we prayed. I asked Kara if she loved Jesus Christ, and she shook her head yes." As Kara was dying, the father sought emergency help, but it was not medical. He wrote this message to David Ell's website: "We need agreement in prayer over our youngest daughter, who is very weak and pale at the moment with hardly any strength." Although Ell's himself didn't answer, the father received a prayer which read in part: "We add faith to Dale and Leilani's and command that spirit of infirmity to loose Kara now, leave her body, leave her home, and go back from where it came and stay there."

Put on trial, Kara's parents were convicted of second-degree reckless homicide. Judge Vincent Howard ordered the couple to serve one month in jail each year for the next six years. One parent will serve the term in March, the other in September.

In 1998, in the journal *Pediatrics*, a study of religion-based medical neglect was presented. It looked at 172 cases of deaths among children treated by faith healing instead of conventional means over twenty years among 23 religious denominations

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Faith Healing Can Kill

Continued from p.7

in 34 states. Faith Assembly in the Midwest led with 64 deaths, the Christian Science Church was second with 28 deaths. Researchers estimated that over 90% of the children would have survived with conventional medical treatment. The study called these cases the "tip of the iceberg," since many are never reported.

According to a Pew poll released in 2008 compiled by interviewing 36,000 adults, Americans are a very religious people with strong beliefs in the supernatural. 80% think that miracles occur. More than half of Americans polled pray at least once a day. About one third say they have experienced or witnessed a divine healing of an illness or injury. Much of the belief in the supernatural, in particular prayer and faith healing, is driven by the growth in Pentecostalism, a fundamentalist movement.

Although the belief in the efficacy of faith healing is widespread, the two religious groups that rely solely on this method of treatment of illness often are Pentecostals and Christian Scientists. Other religious people tend to use conventional medicine and supplement it with a bit of faith healing. Even Christian Scientists sometimes in desperation will seek medical care, but many of the Pentecostals tend to persist with faith healing to the bitter end. Many Pentecostals gain no insight even when one of their children dies since they rationalize that the death was God's will, that the child is in a better place (heaven).

Pentecostals in their faith healing use prayers but also use ancillary methods such as fasting, administering dilute wine, anointing the body with oil, and laying on of hands. Christian

Scientists, however, rely on praying and visits from practitioners that help correct faulty thinking (Christian Scientists believe that disease is illusory and has no reality).

The tragedy is that not one case of faith healing has ever been documented scientifically. In the July-August edition of *Common Sense*, I reviewed the randomized, placebo controlled, double blind studies on prayer and showed that it had no effect. Scientific investigations of faith healing including prayer combined with other modalities have likewise been negative. These studies have been done by Mackay, 1841; Rose, 1968; Nolen, 1974; Randi, 1989; Hines, 2003; Barrett, 2003.

The apparent success of faith healing can be attributed to fraud, the placebo effect, mistaken diagnoses, and the tendency of many maladies to clear up on their own. Faith healing can be thought of as a cooperative form of magical thinking involving a healer and a patient.

The laws on religious child abuse have favorably evolved in the last century, but not nearly fast enough. There is a constant battle between a person's right to have religious freedom and the government's duty to protect children from abuse. The government gradually is coming down on the side of protecting children, although the convictions for allowing children to die for religious reasons usually result in mild sentencing. Although the Supreme Court has twice ruled that parents can't deny needed medical care to children, currently 30 states have exceptions to child-neglect laws that provide shelter from misdemeanor violations to parents who treat their children through prayer in accord with the beliefs of

a recognized religion. 16 of these states, however, have judicial bypass procedures that allow judges to compel medical treatment when the life of the child is at risk.

These state exceptions apply to misdemeanor, not felony violations. In states without religious exceptions, courts may compel parents to seek medical care for their children irrespective of religious beliefs. The negative effect of these state exceptions is that they can provide a possible legal defense for religious child abuse. Unfortunately, Florida is a state with exemptions. The applicable statutes are 415.503 and 39.01(37). Most southeastern states have these exceptions.

Even when the judicial system has no state exceptions, often these children are in isolated communities where the parents' friends and relatives are of the same religious convictions, and hordes of them may visit the sick child without one alerting the authorities.

This problem of religious child abuse is a difficult one to solve since our country is one that values religious freedom. But freethinkers can have a positive effect by taking these measures: 1. Contact state representatives and strongly urge them to remove religious exceptions to child-neglect laws. 2. Provide the media and legislators with the scientific evidence that prayer and faith healing don't work. 3. Encourage all people to immediately report to the authorities any case where necessary medical care is being withheld from a child for religious reasons.

Fortunately, most of society wants to do its best for our children, and this fact bodes well for the eventual resolution of this problem.

Cleric Likes Atheists

Continued from p.9

ROB CURRY HERE: I'd like to take a moment to clarify one point : We did not take any religious community issues into account in choosing where to place a billboard ad. We choose Lakeland because that is where our new chapter opened a little earlier this year. This is likely to happen in other towns

and cities where new chapters of Atheists of Florida are formed

Here's the main point: We did NOT put up the billboard to change anyone's faith. We put it up to find other atheists. (With greater than anticipated success.) Please do not automatically assume the entire world shares your own evangelical outlook. Some of us are content to live and let live. If you

want to know more, please ask us. As you may guess, we're not exactly hesitant to say what we honestly think

I appreciate your support for freedom of speech and against a knee-jerk impulse towards censorship. Rest assured: Atheists of Florida likewise supports the freedom of all Floridians, religious and nonreligious alike, to express their views.

US Bishops & Atheist Clubs

Continued from p.6

rights for gays and women. Fewer young people today are willing to accept bigotry against gays, women, and other minorities, so when they see churches defend that bigotry they are quickly disillusioned of the idea that churches are necessary for morality, civility, or good government. Nor does it take much to recognize that theism isn't, either, and with that people are more willing to seriously consider atheism.

Some of this is specific to the Catholic Church. After several years of witnessing not only revelations of children having been sexually abused for decades, but revelations that the church hierarchy worked hard to cover up that abuse and protect the sexual predators from the law, it's hard for many Catholics to continue seeing their church as a bastion of morality or decency. Even those who remain in the church are disillusioned, but many more are falling away from it—once again, people getting past the idea that being religious or God-fearing is necessary or beneficial or even reasonable.

REPORTER: Do you have a theory about where that's coming from?

CARDINAL GEORGE: I think it's something of a fad, because of the aggressiveness of this new atheism. It captures people [Source: *National Catholic Reporter*].

By that "reasoning" (and I really have to question Cardinal George's reasoning skills now), Christianity is just a "fad." After all, it's aggressive and "captures" people, right? What Cardinal George fails to recognize is that atheism isn't any sort of ideology or philosophy that can "capture" people. When a person announces that they are an atheist, they are announcing that they will no longer live as a captive in whatever theistic system or religion they were raised. Atheism, in the current American context, is generally a shedding of one's previous captive state of Christianity.

I think Cardinal George doesn't like losing so many captives so he's projected his own system's faults onto those who figured out how to get out of it.

Confession of a Christian Cleric ... I like Atheists!

By Joseph Thompson— From SEASONS OF CHANGE blog: (<http://jthelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/11/confessions-of-christian-cleric-i-like.html>) posted Saturday, November 7, 2009.

I RECENTLY POSTED A BLOG titled "Don't Believe In God?" in which I quoted the president of the Atheists of Florida, Rob Curry. As you know, I'm big on this idea of starting points for conversations about God and I'm a firm believer that everybody has a right to express their opinion without the antagonistic vitriol that tends to spew from those who differ in opinion.

At the risk of drawing the ire of many "good Christian folk," I have to admit that Rob Curry became somewhat of a hero to me when he responded to my post with graciousness and class. There was no underlying sense of frustration or bitterness whatsoever in his response (I'm just thinking of the "Christian" response to their billboard). In fact, Rob made it clear that the Atheists of Florida's intent for the billboard was never to dissuade anyone from pursuing whatever faith journey they are on, but simply to find other people who live life from their prism.

This is remarkable, and I'm persuaded that it's a policy that the Church might consider adopting instead of an "us and them" mentality. If we just spread the love of Christ through building authentic, loving relationships with people, who knows what may grow out of those seeds we plant. All too often we view the message of Christianity as if it were a product we're trying to pawn off on people who don't really want it anyway. In reality, the message of Christianity is summed up in the story of the man who found a treasure in a field, sold all he had and purchased the field; It's a message of love and self-sacrifice; A message of caring more about the "treasures" that are found in the people all around us than in what you've acquired ... [Click on the hyperlink above for more, but] I'm appending Rob's response so you can see just how gracious he was.

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LETTERS



THE FOLLOWING LETTER by our member in the Chicago area was published in *The Daily Herald* (serving suburban Chicago) on November 27.

Ed. Note: Since most anti-abortionists hold the view expressed in this letter, I feel that the statute's exceptions were a sop for liberals, not from the far-right religious. However, I think Mr. Utchen feels that pointing out their illogic might prompt some people to rethink the issue.

Hypocrisy in pro-life provisions?

The current health care bill under consideration in the U.S. Congress would contain certain pro-life protections, prohibiting the use of federal funds to pay for abortions except in the case of rape, incest or where necessary to protect the health of the pregnant woman.

Is not there an element of hypocrisy in these pro-life provisions? Either the fetus is an unborn child deserving protection, or it is not, and the fetus has no knowledge as to how it was conceived. Once conceived, why should we permit the fetus to be aborted in cases of rape or incest? Such an abortion kills the unborn child, and why should such killing be allowed simply because the child was conceived by rape or incest? Does conception by rape or incest make the fetus any the less an unborn child? Yet pro-life supporters tell us it's all right to kill the child under such circumstances.

Such a pro-life position seems hypocritical to me. Human life is human life, and once it is conceived, it does not seem logically consistent to permit its murder simply because of the way it was conceived. Let us permit the unborn child to be born, even if it was conceived by rape or incest, and let us punish the perpetrators but not the innocent unborn child. (Let me close by saying that I am totally pro-choice in my own philosophy, but I felt it necessary to point out the irrational position of the pro-life movement.)

Theodore M. Utchen, Wheaton IL

AHA Defines Humanism

[As published in *THE HUMANIST* magazine, a bi-monthly publication of the American Humanist Association (AHA), 1777 T Street NW, Washington, DC 20009.]

"Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice.

Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny."

Definitions of Humanism

[From the website of *Humanist Network News*—Ed.]

Humanism is:

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings." *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*

"...a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

"...a non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values." *Little Oxford Dictionary*

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

"The rejection of religion in favor of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts." *Collins Concise Dictionary*

"A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth." *American Heritage Dictionary*

What do Humanists believe?

Humanists believe that life is a naturally occurring process in the universe, that humans and human consciousness evolved on earth in the same way as all other life on the planet, and that humans will share with all other life the same ultimate fate.

Humanists believe that the application of human reason and the scientific method are the best means for discovery of truth about the universe and ourselves. Humanists reject the notion that the application of intellect to all areas of human concern is in any sense vain or arrogant, and require that all claims to truth be supported by credible, verifiable evidence.

Humanists believe humanity alone is responsible for its own destiny. All values—spiritual, ethical and social—have their source in human experience, are products of evolving culture, and are subject to human critique and amendment. Humanists believe in the common moral decencies, including altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and equal justice for all.

Humanists believe in individual liberty and responsibility, freedom of conscience and speech, and in free inquiry. They support separation of church and state, and are opposed to censorship.

Humanists believe each person has but one life to lead, here and now on this earth; each of us must make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness, and by respect for and cooperation with others we can make this a better world.

HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements

The Following Vision and Mission Statements were approved by the membership on December 19, 2006:

Vision: *HAWCF membership to grow to more than 100 active members by 2010. Media sources in Lakeland are aware that HAWCF exists. Non-Humanists begin to see Humanism, science, and secularism as an ethical, nonthreatening alternative to sectarian supernaturalism. HAWCF has a committee structure of active members performing tasks related to our mission.*

Mission:

1) *Actively increase the public awareness of the Humanist, secular worldview as a rational alternative to views based upon supernaturalism.*

2) *Act as an informational, educational and social resource for members and others on all matters related to Humanistic, Rationalistic and Free-thought ideas.*

Common Sense is the newsletter for members and friends of the Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF). Its purpose is to report information and opinions of interest to members.

Its articles are the opinion of the respective authors only and not necessarily of HAWCF, AHA or CSH.

Permission to reprint articles in this newsletter is granted to all Humanist/Freethought groups provided proper acknowledgement is given. All others write for permission.

Editor: Nan Owens

Associate Editor: Abigail Ann Martin

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What is HAWCF?

The Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF) is a chapter of the American Humanist Association dedicated to the promotion in our area of a rational worldview free from dependence upon supernatural belief systems.

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See page 11 for
state-wide humanist events.

Humanist Association of West Central Florida

A chartered Chapter of the American Humanist Association and an Affiliate of the Council for Secular Humanism

Make check payable to HAWCF and mail to: P.O. Box 6675 • Lakeland, FL 33807-6675 • 863-644-0560

MEMBERSHIP

New Renewal

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I am interested in helping on the following activities

- Membership Recruit, welcome and orient new members to HAWCF
- Civic Action Promote Humanism within community and government
- Activities Develop and facilitate social activities for the membership.
- Programs Arrange/facilitate interesting programs for HAWCF meetings
- Hospitality Facilitate social, housekeeping and refreshment activities for HAWCF
- Education Develop/provide humanist educational & historical materials for HAWCF
- Newsletter Write for or edit HAWCF newsletter
- Publicity Publicize HAWCF and Humanist activities in the community

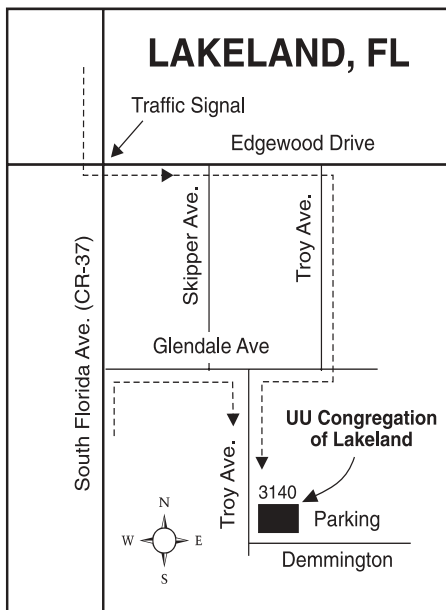
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

WHEN AND WHERE?

THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA usually meets the **3RD Tuesday of every month at 7 pm** (except July, August & December) at the UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LAKELAND (UUCL), 3140 Troy Avenue, Lakeland.

See pages 1 & 3 for December meeting Map and Information.

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



HUMANIST DINNER!!

We usually hold our informal Humanist dinner gathering on the **2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm** at the *Super Buffet* in Grove Park Shopping Center in Lakeland.

PLEASE NOTE: OUR DECEMBER GATHERING IS REPLACED BY OUR ANNUAL SOLSTICE CELEBRATION/BUSINESS MEETING ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, AT THE MT. FUJI STEAKHOUSE. See pages 1 & 3 for a map and further information.



In Cyber Space:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

<http://hawcf.org>

BLOG ADDRESS:

www.HumanistCommonSense.Blogspot.com

PLEASE VISIT each of these sites. Comments or suggestions on either site are earnestly desired and should be brought up at meetings or made directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt: kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com

This newsletter can be printed from our website with adobe acrobat reader.

1st Winter Camp Quest ... To be held in Florida

CAMP QUEST—the first residential camp in the United States for the children and their families of Humanists and other Freethinkers—is opening a **Winter Camp** as a fun holiday (Dec. 25–Jan. 1) at Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, Ft Lauderdale.

To kick off the fun, Camp Quest will open with a “Festivus Party” ... food, games, and, of course, the “infamous” Festivus Pole! Look for a visit from the “Amazing Randi”, enjoy outdoor sports. and much, much more.

Camp Quest seeks to provide a residential camp dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry, critical thinking, creativity, ethics and democracy,

Watch this spot for news about this wonderful venture. In the meantime, for breaking information, go to:

<http://florida.camp-quest.org/>



See inside for exciting news.

Take part in electing your 2010 HAWCF Board.

Come—enjoy friends, good food, merriment!

**DO HUMANISTS CELEBRATE
HOLIDAYS?**

**Inquiring Minds
Want To Know...**



December 2009



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