

Humanist CommonSense

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

Religious Liberty promoted in Lakeland

WHEN: 7 pm, Tuesday, April 19

WHERE: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (see, map on p. 9.)

YOU'VE BEEN SEEING THEIR FACES, hearing their words on TV.



You've seen news stories about them in the papers. *Common Sense* is featuring an abbreviated story about their struggle to uphold the Constitution and religious freedom in Lakeland (page 2).

Join us for a lively treat at our April meeting. Welcome John Kieffer—president of Atheists of Florida, HAWCF member, and longtime activist for civil rights and reason; and Ellenbeth Wachs, Esq.—Atheists of Florida Legal Affairs Coordinator, founder and director of AoF Lakeland Chapter, and founder of SOS Tampa Bay (Secular Organizations for Sobriety). A most honored and achieving panel.



Very briefly—you'll hear more on April 19—Ellenbeth Wachs is an attorney who moved to Lakeland after retiring from her private law practice in Pennsylvania, focused on family law and domestic violence. Here she heads UnCommon Artistry, Inc. an e-commerce jewelry supply business. And gives time and talent to the free-thought and addiction communities.

John Kieffer describes his worldview simply: he went to Vietnam as a Christian and became an atheist in a foxhole. A long-time activist as a humanist and atheist, John returned to college in the early 2000s and earned

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More Sainly Deception

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

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

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH continues its mission to convince the public the supernatural realm is real despite overwhelming lack of scientific evidence. This process is most recently exemplified by a rush to beatify Pope John Paul II.

There are three steps in becoming a saint: Venerable, Beatified (Blessed), and finally Saint. The Venerable category requires extensive documentation that the candidate's life showed heroic virtues. Promotion to the two higher categories demands evidence of miracles. The local church reveres the persons reaching the Venerable and Beatified levels, while the worldwide church venerates persons achieving the Saint level (canonization). During the reign of John Paul II, the process of selecting candidates for sainthood was markedly accelerated. 805 candidates were beatified and 208 were canonized. He found the bureaucracy, which often spent decades evaluating potential saints, was much too slow and cumbersome. In 1983, he instituted major changes that simplified and

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We Must Not Be Silent!

[About Holocaust Remembrance Day]

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.]

"FOR EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON, and a time for every matter under heaven... [This includes] a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." [Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7]

These words of beautiful poetry come from the Hebrew Bible. They should be permanently affixed to every human heart and mind on Earth because they speak a truth no one can ever afford to forget.

It is the timing of this edition of *Common Sense* which calls this ancient passage to my attention so that I want to bring it to yours. You should receive this newsletter sometime in April, I'm told; that is all to the good for it is May 1 I want to have you focus upon here. That is Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day—and even if we are not Jewish, it is a day all of us who are Humanists should very much want to observe.

Why in the world would anyone want to remember all the atrocities that Hitler and his Nazis committed between 1938 and 1945? Ask almost any Jew and you will hear the same answer: So that such horrible things will

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CALENDAR Spring-2011

April 19	HAWCF Regular Meeting
May 9	Humanist Dinner
June 13	Humanist Dinner

Loopy Law in Lakeland: Civil Liberties Eruptions in Local Government

I Atheist Arrested at School Board Meeting

ON FEB 22, 2011, the *Lakeland Ledger* reports, the president of Atheists of Florida found himself on the wrong side of the law.

As John Kieffer later told 10 News TV, he and others went to the Polk County school board meeting “to educate school board members about the separation of church and state.”

In response to earlier protests, the school board had moved their opening prayer “before the gavel” so it would not be an official activity of the board. At this point,, a local minister leaned over the podium to call the meeting attendees to prayer.

According to the *Lakeland Ledger*, Kieffer and Ellenbeth Wachs (Atheists of Florida legal affairs coordinator) stood near the podium taking pictures, and continuing to talk. After the prayer was concluded, board member Frank O’Reilly rebuked Kieffer for disrupting the prayer. Kieffer retorted, “Prayer has no place in government!” Whereupon an officer was called in to remove Kieffer, who was arrested for disorderly conduct, resisting arrest without violence, and possession of a prescription drug without proof (apparently a single pill of an anti-anxiety medication).

The newspaper quotes Wachs: “This was outrageous. This was a total shock. We were simply milling about the room prior to the start of the meeting, just like people do at the start of meetings. When the police officer charged him and dragged him away, I was just astounded.”

Wachs and Kieffer say they don’t care if people pray, it just shouldn’t be done on government time.

At meeting’s end, school board members and the remaining audience proposed putting prayer back into the agenda—clearly, they don’t have the right to require everyone to be silent and respectful unless their prayer is part of the official meeting. The school board members encouraged attendees to go to their churches and synagogues to raise support, ruefully noting that it will be costly to fight

a court battle over this.

No video of the disruption was recorded as the official meeting had not yet started.

2 Florida Atheists Challenge Transfer of County Property to Churches

FOLLOWING THE REMOVAL of basketball equipment from local jails by Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd—“it isn’t a place for fun and games, after all”—Atheists of Florida (AofFL) countered that the Sheriff exceeded his authority when gave away county-owned equipment to churches. AofFL delivered a letter to the Sheriff asking him to cease and desist his transfer of basketball equipment from the Polk County jail facility to eight area churches.

According to AofFL, the sports equipment is the property of county taxpayers and as such cannot be arbitrarily transferred to private religious institutions. The organization does not challenge Judd’s right to remove the equipment from the jail facility. Rather, it recommends the county property be transferred to other county facilities such as public parks and/or schools. Atheists of Florida asserts that Judd’s transfer of public assets to religious facilities constitutes a violation of both United States and Florida Constitutions.

Muslima Lewis, a senior staff attorney with American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, said the state and federal constitutions both unequivocally forbid this kind of action. “Based on what we’ve seen it seems to me that the Polk County Sheriff deciding to favor selected religious organizations with donations of equipment, and that equipment having been purchased with taxpayer dollars is a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution and the State constitution. Without passing on the wisdom of the Sheriff’s decision to remove the recreational facilities from the jail.”

3 Atheists of Florida Officially Arrested. Payback? Intimidation?

ELLENBETH WACHS, the legal coordinator for the Atheists of Florida, was arrested March 3 on charges that she illegally posed as a licensed lawyer, according to the State Attorney’s Office. She was released after posting a \$1,000 bond.

Wachs said that she considers the

charge to be retaliation for her group’s challenges to prayers at public meetings and over donations of public property to churches by the Polk County Sheriff’s Office.

Wachs said, “They are quite happy with the Christian theocracy they have created, and we’ve rocked the boat.”

Deputies arrested Wachs at her home. They served a search warrant and seized her computer and other items.

The State Attorney’s Office says an investigation into allegations against Wachs began earlier. It noted that Wachs had practiced law in Pennsylvania, but is retired from that state’s bar and is not a member of the Florida Bar. Wachs is facing a third-degree felony, punishable by up to five years in prison.

It claims the charge of “unauthorized practice of law” includes people who hold themselves out to the public as qualified to practice law or use “a name, title, addition or description” to imply such a qualification. The State Attorney’s affidavit states that Wachs signed several letters to the Polk County Sheriff’s Office using the title “Esq.,” typically used by lawyers.

The affidavit claims that the sheriff’s legal affairs coordinator had been under the impression Wachs was a licensed lawyer because Wachs cited statute and case law opinions and said she was “representing” the Atheists of Florida.

Lakeland Mayor Gow Fields provided the State Attorney’s Office with a sworn statement describing a heated discussion in which Wachs argued that invocations at city commission meetings were not constitutional. According to the court papers, “It was at this point ... that Ms. Wachs informed Mayor Fields that she should know because she is an attorney and that if he and the city did not comply with the request to remove prayer from the commission meeting they would sue the City of Lakeland.”

John Kieffer, the organization’s president, said Wachs is not the group’s lawyer, and denied she had worked for the group in that capacity. “She’s trained as an attorney, went to school. But she doesn’t practice here. She is not paid a penny; we’re all volunteers. She’s not practicing any more than I’m practicing law.”

More Sainly Deception

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streamlined the process. First, he eliminated the office of the “devil’s advocate,” whose role was to meticulously evaluate a candidate’s record for fatal flaws precluding sainthood. Second, he reduced the number of miracles required. Before 1983, beatification required two miracles, and canonization required another two. In each case he reduced the number to one. The miracles were events the Catholic Church thought could not be explained by natural means, usually ones where a person successfully prayed to the dead potential saint for help, most often for supernatural healing.

Immediately after his death, there was a Catholic groundswell of enthusiasm to make John Paul II a saint. Pope Benedict, his successor, has continued Pope John’s eagerness to bolster the saintly ranks. Pope Benedict XVI has pushed the sainthood process vigorously for John Paul II. Recently he signed an official decree saying John Paul II will be beatified on May 1, 2011.

The Catholic Church’s elevation of people to sainthood if the candidates have led exemplary humanitarian lives could be a praiseworthy act. But the claim that certain members of their church possess supernatural powers including the performance of miracles is hypocritical, deceptive, and unscientific. No miracle has ever been confirmed by science. No case of supernatural healing has ever been documented in extensive studies in the medical literature.

Since the essential foundation of science is the concept that the material Universe operates according to natural laws, any scientifically literate person would expect there to be no scientific evidence for miracles or for a supernatural realm. Even a single exception would invalidate any natural law.

Protestant reformers rejected the idea that miracles had continued past the age of the apostles. Miracles, however, were always an essential belief in the Catholic Church since they provided strong incentives for conversions, increased church revenue from exhibits of alleged miracles, and

apparent confirmation of God’s reality as well as confirmation of other elements of the supernatural realm.

The claim of a miracle associated with Pope John Paul II clearly shows the hypocritical and deceptive nature of the sainthood process. The story of the miracle cure reported by the church follows: Sister Marie Simon-Pierre suffered from Parkinson’s disease and was cured after praying to Pope John. (Incidentally, he himself had Parkinson’s disease but was unable to cure himself with his magical powers). Sister Marie could barely move her left side, could not write legibly, drive, or move around easily, and was in constant pain. She described how in 2007 how, after praying all night to the recently deceased Pope John and writing his name on a piece of paper, she awakened cured. She returned to work as a maternity nurse with no trace of the disease.

This story has my “baloney detector” beeping wildly. The medical records are not available for scrutiny by medical experts, and I suspect that an accurate history would not agree with what has been reported by the church. Even from this sketchy information, the neurological illness as described sounds incompatible with Parkinson’s disease in its symptoms, signs, and in the claim of sudden remission, which doesn’t occur without medication in Parkinson’s disease. Multiple sclerosis, which could fit the symptoms and signs, and is capable of having dramatic spontaneous remissions, is a possible diagnosis.

According to the Vatican’s own rules, the “cure” must be instantaneous, complete, and permanent. Since Sister Marie is still living, a conclusion cannot be reached about the permanency of the “cure” until she is followed to the end of her life. In reports from two prominent newspapers, *Rzeczpolpolita* in Poland and the *Guardian* in England, she has already relapsed.

Most cases examined by the Catholic Church in the process of establishing sainthood, including the one of Sister Marie, are surrounded by great secrecy, but there was one major exception in the canonizing of Mother Teresa where aggressive investi-

gations revealed much information. This case spoke volumes about the lack of integrity of the process and is worth reviewing in some detail.

After Mother Teresa’s death in 1997 at the age of 87, Pope Paul II put her on the fast track to sainthood. He started the beatification process only two years after her death instead of the usual minimum wait of five years because of numerous requests from her admirers.

The “cure” of Monica Besra seemed to be just what the Vatican required for her beatification. The patient, a 32 year old, West Bengali tribal woman, claimed she had been miraculously cured of a painful abdominal tumor.

Monica Besra stated her cure occurred during her stay at the Missionaries of Charity home in the town of Patiram, one of 131 hospices for the destitute established by Mother Teresa’s order worldwide (her original hospice was established in Calcutta in 1949). In a report to the Vatican, Monica Besra described her illness and recovery. She said: “I had a swelling and the stomach was hard. For two months I had terrible pain and I was crying. I was not able to sleep. I could lay only on the left side and I couldn’t stand straight. The sisters gave me medicine but the pain was still there. I was always praying to Mother Teresa, whose picture was on the wall opposite my bed.”

When Ms. Besra’s pain persisted, two nuns caring for her, sisters Bartholomea and Ann Sevika, were inspired to try a new tactic. On September, 5, 1998, they tied an oval shaped silver medallion, with Mother Teresa’s photograph on it, over the painful area with a piece of black thread passed around the abdomen and started praying for her.

Ms. Besra described the remarkable outcome: “I heard them praying in English. I too prayed with them to Mother Teresa. During the prayer I felt very light in my stomach, mind, and heart. I felt full of joy and happy and I slept and my stomach was becoming smaller and smaller [and] in three days my stomach was completely all right.”

The Vatican’s confirmation of this

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“miracle” was based solely on the patient’s story as recorded by one sister. Like all faith-healings, this example, more egregiously than most, simply doesn’t stand up to careful scientific investigation.

This claim of a supernatural healing would have gone unchallenged were it not for a vigorous Indian Rationalist Association investigation and spirited public statements by physicians who treated Monica Besra, as well as statements by the patient’s husband. As the information unfolded, it became clear that Ms. Besra’s cure was in no way unusual but due to conventional medical treatment.

She had tuberculosis that involved the meninges (membrane covering the brain and spinal cord) and the abdomen, producing an enlarged ovary. Dr. Mansur Murshed, superintendent of Balurghat Hospital in West Bengal, where she was admitted, stated she was cured after nine months of conventional anti-tuberculosis treatment.

Ms. Besra first began having headaches and vomiting in 1998. She did not respond to treatment by a local doctor and on June 11, 1998, was admitted to Balurghat Hospital and treated for tubercular meningitis. She remained in the hospital for approximately one week and was discharged on appropriate anti-tubercular medication. The patient returned to the hospital in August with abdominal enlargement and pain and was found to have an enlarged ovary due to involvement with tuberculosis. After discharge, she received follow-up treatment at the North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, and gradually improved. Her treatment ended suc-

cessfully in March, 1999, at which time she had no clinical evidence of tuberculosis and a final ultrasound showed that the ovarian enlargement had cleared.

The state government was forced to order an inquiry when doctors and rationalists protested vociferously against the miracle claim. Magistrate Goutom Ghosh, who headed the inquiry, and Arun Sarkar, an official of the Harirampur block, interviewed villagers, doctors, and Besra family members before concluding that any claim of a miracle was baseless. Ghosh told reporters: “Monica Besra’s tumor was cured purely by medical science. She received continuous anti-tubercular treatment and went through all the necessary curative processes. So any talk of her case being beyond the comprehension of medical science is baseless.”

Doctors who treated her reported that representatives of the Roman Catholic Church had tried to induce them to say her cure was beyond the comprehension of medical science. Dr. Murshed, for example, reported: “The Missionaries of Charity and the local church have been inviting me and the other doctors to their functions to ensure that we say Besra was cured by a miracle.”

Monica Besra’s husband was mightily ticked off by the whole sorry episode. He complained: “It is much ado about nothing. My wife was cured by the doctors and not by any miracle.” He made an astute observation about the “healing” medallion: “My wife did feel less pain one night when she used the locket, but her pain had been coming and going. Then she went to the doctors, and they cured her.” He concludes further: “This miracle is a hoax.” Mr. Besra sounds like a fine,

rational gentleman. He stated his honor was at stake, and he had to make it clear where he stood with the facts. He stated emphatically: “We are not liars.”

Agents of the Vatican under the leadership of chief investigator Brian Kolodiejchuk sent in a dossier of more than 34,000 pages on Mother Teresa, including *several hundred* examples of her supernatural capabilities. On receiving all the required information, Pope John II moved Mother Teresa’s beatification inexorably forward, ignoring the fact that the required “miracle,” when stripped of its holiness aura, was an obvious fraud.

Most of the media report the “confirmation” of these “miracles” in a matter-of-fact manner as if miracles were a regular occurrence. This behavior by the media should come as no surprise to freethinkers since the media’s members tend to be believers and often do not have a firm foundation in science and scientific thinking.

Convincing people to give up their long-held irrational beliefs in miracles and other aspects of the supernatural is a tall order, one that has so far had only marginal success. Any chance of real success will need to include much more forceful and effective teaching of science and scientific thinking (critical thinking) in our schools. Also, much better communication with the public should be a top priority. Although improved rapport with the media will be of some help, the major thrust should be to develop independent freethought media. Only in this way can freethinkers bypass the distortion and censorship resulting from the conventional media.

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his Bachelors and Masters of Arts in Religious Studies, University of South Florida, Tampa. He has also been a guest lecturer for a Vietnam War History course at Hillsborough County high schools, servicing approximately 12 schools each semester.

Hear more about the dust-ups over religion in government in our area. Bring your friends—this should interest the “man on the street” (and woman).

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Challenge to this Myth: Atheists Believe in a Random Universe

The following article was posted by Austin Cline on the blog About.com. Permission was granted to print, distribute, and post with proper citation and acknowledgment. Read the article online at <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheismscienceevolution/a/RandomUniverse.htm?nl=1>

Does the Absence of a God Entail that the Universe be Disordered?

MYTH: *Atheists believe the universe is random—that it operates and behaves randomly. Only if God exists could the universe not be random, but if the universe really were random we would not be here.*

RESPONSE: It's difficult to know whether to categorize this claim as a myth because atheists do commonly describe the universe as "random" in some sense, but that does not make the claim *true*. Where the problem lies is how religious theists who make or believe this claim misunderstand or misrepresent what "random" means. When used correctly, it can be a correct description of many atheists' positions. When used in the manner that many theists seem to intend it, it's incorrect—thus a myth.

First, let's take a look at a couple of the basic definitions of RANDOM:

1. Proceeding, made, or occurring without definite aim, purpose, reason, or pattern: the random selection of numbers.

2. Statistics: of or characterizing a process of selection in which each item of a set has an equal probability of being chosen; where all outcomes are equally likely, as in the testing of a blood sample for the presence of a substance. Unpredictable.

Atheists may believe that the universe is random in most of the senses described above, depending on the exact context or situation. Atheists obviously don't believe that there are any gods who created and are guiding the universe, so it's unlikely that they believe the universe was made or exists with purpose, aim, or reason. Atheists don't dispute that there are patterns in the universe, though, and even in truly random sets—like sequences of numbers—patterns will emerge. The existence of patterns does not contradict the existence of randomness.

Atheists may also believe that, in many circumstances, all members of a set of possible outcomes are either equally likely to occur, almost equally likely to occur, or if not then it's not possible to predict which is the most likely to occur. Religious theists may often believe that whatever happens does so as part of God's plans for them and the world, but atheists don't believe in any gods which might be guiding events and causing certain outcomes to occur rather than others. Whatever happens, happens according to natural laws which may or may not favor particular outcomes—and sometimes, those outcomes may be random

for all practical intents and purposes.

When religious theists accuse atheists of believing in a "random" universe, though, they don't normally seem to mean that atheists simply disbelieve that the universe was created without a specific purpose or that some events are unpredictable. The first is almost the definition of atheism and some theists agree with the latter, so neither of these would be much of a criticism.

Instead, what many religious theists seem to mean is that atheists' belief requires *a universe without order*—that randomness entails disorder—and that therefore the existence of order in the universe means that some god (preferably their god) must exist. The equation of randomness with disorder is incorrect and this is why the above claim amounts to a myth: atheists' beliefs do not entail that the universe be disordered and order can in fact arise spontaneously, without any directed intervention from a conscious being.

Atheists do not deny that the universe has order, structure, and patterns. What atheists deny, and science supports them in this, is the idea that order, structure, and patterns are incompatible with randomness or that they require the prior presence of some "designer" for them to exist. A structured, ordered universe can be random in some aspects, does not need any sort of god to explain how it originated, and does not need any sort of god to explain why it continues to exist now.

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happen “Never again!” [17:384f.] To that end, on April 12, 1951, Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, proclaimed the 27th of Nissan in the Hebrew calendar to be Yom HaShoah. In 1959, the Knesset made it a national public holiday in Israel, and in 1961, a law was passed that closed all public entertainment on this day, and required that at 10 a.m., a siren be sounded so that everyone would stop what they are doing, pull over in their cars, and stand for a moment in remembrance. [13] Israeli T.V. and radio channels broadcast mourning songs and documentaries about the Holocaust, without commercials; and all flags on public buildings are flown at half mast. Also, tens of thousands of Israeli high school students, and thousands of Jews from around the world, hold a memorial service in Auschwitz. Called “The March of the Living,” it symbolizes defiance of the Holocaust death marches. It is sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Education and the Holocaust Claims Conference, and is part of a formal, several-months-long academic study of World War II and the Holocaust.[22]

There are no set rules or rituals for Yom HaShoah. [13] But two facts cause most Jewish communities to hold solemn ceremonies. [22] First, “to survivors, the Holocaust remains real and ever-present,” and second, 6 million Jews were murdered and many families were completely decimated.[22 & 7] Some Jews observe this day within the synagogue, while others hold communal vigils and educational programs. Some ceremonies include talks by Holocaust survivors, recitation of psalms, songs or readings, or viewing Holocaust-related films. To dramatize the unfathomable death of six million Jews, some read the names of Holocaust victims one after another.[22] Others symbolize the deaths by lighting six candles. [22]

You ought to know already who Adolf Hitler was; how he wished to make the “Aryan race” dominant in the world; how his “Nuremberg Laws” deprived Jews of their citizenship, invalidated their marriages, and prohib-

ited their sexual activity. [17:345ff. & 18:517f.]

You should already know that the Holocaust was Hitler’s “Final Solution” to what he described as the “Jewish Problem” [17:358f. & 18:520]; that he made Jews wear yellow stars and other people he despised wear symbols of other colors [17:348f.]; that besides the Jews, those other people included gypsies, Poles and Slavs, political dissidents, dissenting clergy, the physically and mentally handicapped, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, mixed-race children, vagrants, prostitutes, alcoholics, Freemasons, Communists, and others deemed “unfit for society.” [16 & 2]

You should already know about *Kristallnacht* (Nov. 9-10, 1938), the “largest pogrom in the history of the world”; the Nazis’ scattered mass executions of Jews and others such as occurred at Babi Yar, Russia, in 1941; the concentration/death camps in Auschwitz, Treblinka, and other cities; and the so-called “medical experiments” of Dr. Josef Mengele. [17:351-365]

You should already know all these things and so should your children and your grandchildren. If you don’t, then the time has come for you to learn.[9, 10 & 11] If they don’t, then the time has come for you to tell them.

Silence about these things is inappropriate. On Yom HaShoah, the emphasis is not so much on bare facts and figures as it is on the *personal stories* of the people whose lives were changed forever by the evil that was done to them. In this regard, *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night* by Elie Wiesel should be required reading for everyone. [20; 17:367, 385; & 4]

For this Yom HaShoah, I want to share with you a few such *personal stories*. The first comes from Rachel, a Jewish survivor who was born in Brussels, Belgium in 1934. She had enjoyed a happy childhood prior to the German invasion. In a video that is available on-line she describes the day when the Gestapo came searching for her while she was living among Carmelite nuns in a monastery. Here is what she says: “One day the Gestapo came in and the Carmelite—they were Carmelite nuns, and as you know

the men cannot go there. It’s one of their rules; they cannot see men. They knocked on the door and [said] we want her—with the guns and all—we want that Jewish child. We know you have a Jewish child there. And the nuns said absolutely not. We don’t have anybody. And they broke the door. And what I will never forget is that the six nuns, they had a big basket of laundry that they carried three on the side, because there was a lot of laundry for all of these priests. And they pushed me in that laundry to hide me and they put all the linen on top. That happened like in one second. And that’s how I was saved.” [1]

“The Germans generally targeted Jewish children as their first victims, both because they were too small to do forced labor and to ensure that they [would] not grow up and bring another generation of Jews into the world. Between one and one and a half million children were among the six million murdered Jews... when the Nazis decided it was not worth ‘wasting’ gas on children...SS men would sometimes throw living Jewish children straight into the crematoria furnaces.” [18:523]

In the face of outrageous humiliation, torture and death, most Jews behaved with bravery and honor. The Jews of Kelme, Lithuania were typical. Standing before pits they had been forced to dig, their rabbi asked the German officer to be allowed to speak to them one last time. Grudgingly, the German demanded it be brief. Speaking serenely, slowly, as if during a regular synagogue meeting, the rabbi encouraged his flock to honor their god by their proper behavior (by performing *Kiddush Ha-Shem*). Then he said to the German officer, “I have finished. You may begin.” As the Germans proceeded to shoot them all, the Jews held their silence and met death with dignity. [18:523f.; 19:227]

“Of course, not all victims acted heroically.” That the Germans’ fiendish cruelty reduced some people to their lowest animal instinct for survival was one of the greatest atrocities of the Holocaust. Having already dug pits, the Germans entered one ghetto in Poland and began searching. A

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We Must Not Be Silent!

Continued from p. 6

teenage boy—a d-girlfriend hid in a house behind sacks of flour; and a mother and her three children joined them, the mother in one corner and her children in another. When the Germans rushed in one boy screamed, “Mama! Mama!” until another boy told him in Yiddish “Don’t say ‘Mama.’ They’ll take her too!” The mother remained silent as the Germans dragged away her children. She and the couple were not found. The male teenager later wrote: “I will always hear that... ‘Don’t say Mama’ and I will always remember the sight of the mother... hitting her head against the wall, as if to punish herself for remaining silent...” [Telushkin, Wisdom, 524, 525f.]

Even had there been no gas chambers or ovens, life itself in the concentration camps was hell on earth. Here is one inmate’s description of Sobibor:

I shall tell the story of one day, an ordinary day, much like any other. That day I worked cleaning out a shed. . . . An umbrella had gotten stuck in a roof beam, and the SS man Paul Groth ordered a boy to get it down. The boy climbed up, fell from the roof and was injured. Groth punished him with twenty-five lashes. He was pleased with what had happened and called over another German and told him he had found ‘parachutists’ among the Jews. We were ordered to climb up to the roof one after another. . . . The majority did not succeed; they fell down, broke legs, were whipped, bitten by [the German Shepherd dog]...and shot. This game was not enough for Groth. There were many mice around, and each of us was ordered to catch two mice. He selected five prisoners, ordered them to pull down their trousers, and we dropped the mice inside. The people were ordered to remain at attention, but they could not without moving. They were whipped. But this was not enough for Groth. He called over a Jew, forced him to drink alcohol until he fell dead. . . . We were ordered to lay the man on a board, pick him up and slowly march while singing

a funeral march. This is a description of one ordinary day. And many of them were even worse.[18:526; 17:360]

Apart from the Nazi perpetrators and their victims, there were also the bystanders. These do-nothings included both individuals and whole nations. Their evil was symbolized dramatically by ships.

You probably know about the infamous “Voyage of the Damned.” [17:353ff.; 18:529f.] In May, 1939, 937 German Jews boarded the S.S. *St. Louis* and sailed to Cuba seeking refuge. But, neither Cuba nor the U.S. would admit them. On returning to Europe, England, Holland, Belgium and France admitted some; but those who went to the last three countries soon died in Nazi camps. One survivor, Gerda Blachmann Wilchfort, said this about their voyage: “Humans are always hopeful. You know, we always cling to the hope something is going to happen. They’re not going to let us rot on the ocean.” [21 & 16]

But that was precisely what happened to the 769 Jews who tried to flee Germany to safety in Palestine aboard the ship *Struma*. [12] They sailed first for Turkey to pick up Palestinian immigration certificates from the British who were in charge. But they were refused papers. No country would permit them to land, and only one person, a pregnant woman, was allowed off the ship. Two months passed. Water, food, and fuel ran out. Eventually the Turks towed the ship six miles out to sea and left it. After a couple of hours, it exploded and sank—probably the victim of a Soviet torpedo. Only one person survived.

One of the darkest moments of the Nazi era was when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain pursued a policy of appeasement toward Hitler. He even met with *der Fuhrer* and returned to England announcing that he had brought back “peace in our time.” [17:349ff.] What a foolish falsehood.

Ever since World War II ended, Jews have said, “Never again!” [17:384f.] They mean that they will never allow another Holocaust to happen to them. This is not an empty slogan, either,

for anti-Semitism did not end with the close of that war. In fact, it has been exacerbated by a new generation of historical revisionists who claim, against all the evidence, that there never was a Holocaust at all. [17:382 & 18:554] Today, both Jews and Israel are as threatened as ever, perhaps even more so...

...and, they are not alone! Holocausts of ethnic cleansing are going on in Darfur and other places. The rights of Muslim women are being trampled around the world. Prisoners are being tortured by governments (including our own); and homosexuals are being discriminated against and murdered almost everywhere. [5 & 6]

Do you remember Martin Niemöller? He was an anti-Nazi German pastor who was arrested and sent to two different German concentration camps, and then on to Austria to be executed. He and other inmates were rescued, however, by the Allies. [15] Niemöller wrote a poem, since republished in many versions, which ought to speak to every one of us. It says:

First they came for the Communists,

and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the labor leaders,

and I did not speak out because I was not a labor leader.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me. [16 & 8]

Someday it could be us, the Humanists, they come for.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...

There *is* a time to keep silence...in the beauty of an awesome sunrise; at a tender moment in your lover’s arms; beside the body of a relative or friend.

But, when injustice threatens to hurt or kill innocent people, then, we must not be silent! Then it is, indeed, “a time to speak.”

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HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements A

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 Freethought ideas.

Definitions of Humanism

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

Humanism is:

"...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*

"...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*

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

LINKS: Central Florida Freethought

Atheists of Florida Inc.
 AtheistsofFlorida.org
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 meetup.com/GotReason
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 (HUSBAY)
 http://sarasota.humanists.net
 Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (UUCL)
 uuclakeland.org

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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Humanist Association of West Central Florida

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

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I am interested in helping on the following activities

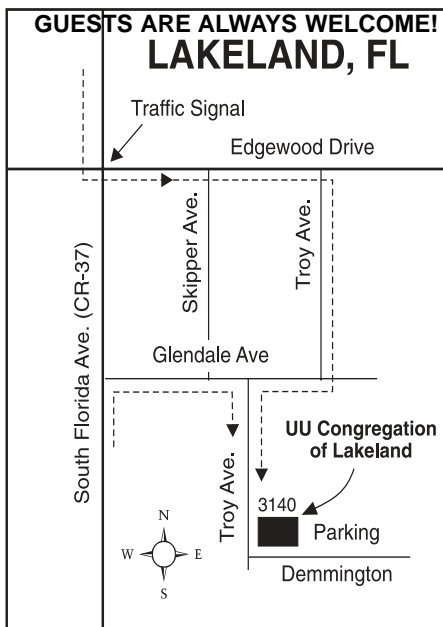
- Membership Recruit, welcome and orient new members to HAWCF
- Civic Action Promote Humanism within community and government
- Activities Develop and facilitate social activities for the membership.
- Programs Arrange/facilitate interesting programs for HAWCF meetings
- Hospitality Facilitate social, 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?

IN 2011, THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA will meet on **the 3RD Tuesday of February, April, September and November at 7 pm** at the UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LAKELAND (UUCL), 3140 Troy Avenue, Lakeland.

See map below.



HUMANIST DINNER!!

JUST A REMINDER: each month we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering (except December).

WHEN:

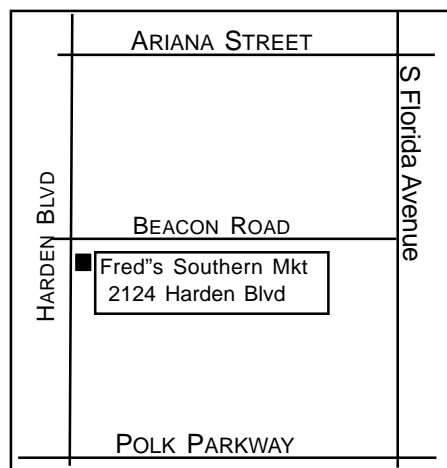
The 2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.



WHERE:

Fred's Southern Market ...

located at 2124 Harden Boulevard in Lakeland (just south of Beacon Road on east side of the road). See Map below
PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



THE RATIONALIST SERVICE MOVEMENT KNOWN AS SOS ... Secular Organizations for Sobriety ... is now available in west central Florida.

SOS Tampa Bay is an alternative, science-based recovery method for alcoholics or drug addicts who are uncomfortable with the spirituality in 12-Step programs. Meetings are open every Monday, 7:30–8:30 pm, at 3614 S Manhattan Avenue, Tampa. Dates and locations will be added to meet local need. Visit it online at <http://sostampabay.org> or check it out on Facebook.

In Cyber Space:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

<http://hawcf.org>

Please visit our sites. Comments or suggestions are earnestly desired: bring them up at meetings or email directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt: kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com.

Note: this newsletter also can be printed from our website with adobe acrobat reader.

See inside for exciting news.

Why do we need to be vigilant and fight for religious freedom continually?

How does it benefit all citizens?

Is this a good thing?

What does separation of religion and government mean?



Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

Spring 2011



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