

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)

Getting the Imperial out of Imperial Polk County

WHEN: 7 pm, Tuesday, October 18

WHERE: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (see, map on p. 11)

WHAT HAPPENS ... when a militant activist atheist determined to hold government officials accountable takes on a fundamentalist Christian sheriff on a self-proclaimed mission from God? ...

A persecution the likes of which haven't been seen since the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Thousands of atheists from around the globe have rallied. For now the sheriff has been silenced. But the story continues. ...

Join us to hear this exciting story, happening in your own back yard right here in the city of Lakeland, Polk County, Florida, And to become part of an historic event that is still unfolding as we speak!

To talk about our speaker EllenBeth

Wachs—my first comment can only be: Whew! How does she do it all? And so well!

To start from the beginning: Lakeland resident EllenBeth Wachs, Esq., came to us from Pennsylvania, where she led a

successful private law practice focusing on Family Law and Domestic Violence.

As the designation "Esq." above denotes, Ms Wachs is an attorney. She earned a BA from Villanova University (Major in Sociology, minor in Philosophy) in 1990, JD from Widener University School of Law in 1993.

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Refractory Jesus Myth

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

Dr. Williamson, a chapter member and long-time 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 JESUS MYTH IS ALIVE AND WELL: its fascination for the faithful grows with time. Two examples of this intense interest are Mel Gibson's blockbuster movie *The Passion of the Christ* and Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*. This novel sold, as of March 2006, 40 million copies. It espouses provocative heretical ideas including the opinion that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and embarked on a course of sacred copulation producing a daughter. Unfortunately, the enthusiastic supporters of these new twists on the standard Jesus myth will have to fall back on the standard model, since the TV program *Sixty Minutes* produced convincing evidence that documents used in creating this book were fraudulent.

The debate about whether Jesus was an actual historical figure was initiated in 1778 in Germany by Reimarus, who was not a theologian. Actually, the most objective investiga-

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Onward Christian Soldiers?

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.

YES, YOU'VE CAUGHT ME. Once again I've been reading one of my favorite theologians: Saint Mark. His varied and often humorous writings never fail to enlighten me intellectually and to strengthen me spiritually—at least he always heightens my spirits and so I am ever ready to hoist a tankard of spirits in his honor.

Mark?! you say. What Mark is this?

It is Mark Twain, of course, the brilliant man who said: "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." [4:138]

Besides his classics about Tom and Huck, I'm sure you are probably also familiar with many of his other masterpieces, especially the ones which touch (or pounce) on religion, such as *Letters from the Earth*. [18]

As a Christmas present last year, my wonderful daughter gave me the *Autobiography of Mark Twain: Volume 1*. [17] Though some parts of it are rather soporiferous, others are

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CALENDAR Summer-Fall 2011

October 10	Humanist Dinner <i>SEE MAP ON P. 11</i>
October 18	HAWCF Regular Meeting <i>..... NO Humanist Dinner in November</i>
November 15	HAWCF Regular Meeting
December TBA ...	Humanist Annual Meeting

Was half of the New Testament forged?

IN A CNN ONLINE POSTING earlier this year, CNN religion reporter John Blake posted a story headlining research by noted New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman: “Half of New Testament forged, Bible scholar says”.¹

Blake opens his CNN posting with a dramatic portrait:

A frail man sits in chains inside a dank, cold prison cell. He has escaped death before but now realizes that his execution is drawing near. “I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come,” the man—the Apostle Paul—says in the Bible’s 2 Timothy. “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”

Blake set a scene for the Apostle Paul’s last words from a Roman prison cell before being beheaded.

Alas. According to Blake, “There’s just one problem—Paul [the New Testament’s most prolific author], didn’t write those words. In fact, virtually half the New Testament was written by impostors taking on the names of apostles like Paul.”

He quotes Bart D. Ehrman, a leading biblical scholar and historian of early Christianity, from Ehrman’s new book *Forged*. “There were a lot of people in the ancient world who thought that lying could serve a greater good.” Ehrman further claims:

- » At least 11 of the 27 New Testament books are forgeries.
- » New Testament books attributed to Jesus’ disciples could not have been written by them because they were illiterate.
- » Many New Testament forgeries were manufactured by early Christian leaders trying to settle theological feuds.

Blake notes that biblical academics of many stripes agree and disagree with Ehrman. He cites Ben Witherington, a New Testament scholar and author, who calls Ehrman’s book “Gullible Travels, for it reveals over and over again the willingness of people to believe even outrageous things,” that all the

New Testament books, except perhaps 2 Peter, “can be traced back to a very small group of literate Christians, some of whom were eyewitnesses to the lives of Jesus and Paul.”

Witherington claims that Ehrman’s studies underestimate the considerable role that scribes played in transcribing documents during the earliest days of Christianity: “Even if Paul didn’t write the second book of Timothy, he would have dictated it to a scribe for posterity. ... When you have a trusted colleague or co-worker who knows the mind of Paul, there was no problem in antiquity with that trusted co-worker hearing Paul’s last testimony in prison. This is not forgery. This is the last will and testament of someone who is dying.”

Back to Ehrman, who broadens his critique to challenge the authenticity of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, stating Jesus’ disciples did not write any of them ... none of the earliest gospels revealed the authors’ names ... the names by which we know them were added later by scribes. He adds that John and Peter, two of Jesus’ original disciples, could not have written the New Testament books attributed to them because they were illiterate. “According to Acts 4:13, both Peter and his companion John, also a fisherman, were *agrammatoi*, a Greek word that literally means ‘unlettered,’ that is, ‘illiterate,’ he writes.

Ehrman writes particularly about Paul’s writings, which make up the lion’s share of the New Testament: he says that Paul wrote barely half of the New Testament letters attributed to him—7 out of the 13—that the remaining books are forgeries. Ehrman’s proof: inconsistencies in the language, choice of words and blatant contradiction in doctrine.

For example, the scholar points to a [in]famous passage in 1 Corinthians in which Paul purportedly implored women to be “silent” in church, and “if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home.” But note that only three chapters earlier in the very same book, Paul urges that women who pray and prophesy in church should cover their heads with veils. Ehrman asks: “If they were

allowed to speak in chapter 11, how could they be told not to speak in chapter 14?”

Ehrman explains that forgers often did this work when they were seeking to settle early church disputes. The early church, we know, was not a monolithic movement and as such was often embroiled in conflict—therefore, Ehrman says, people argued over the treatment of women, over the leadership, and about relations between masters and slaves. “There was competition among different groups of Christians about what to believe and each of these groups wanted to have authority to back up their views. ... If you were a nobody, you wouldn’t sign your own name to your treatise. You would sign Peter or John.”

Ehrman estimates approximately 100 forgeries were created in the name of Jesus’ inner-circle during the first four centuries of the church.

Though Witherington concedes that fabrications and forgeries floated around the earliest Christian communities, he doesn’t accept that Peter, for example, could not have been literate because he was a fisherman. “Fishermen had to do business. Guess what? That involves writing, contracts and signed documents,” he told an interviewer. “We live in a Jesus-haunted culture that’s biblically illiterate,” he says. “Almost anything can pass for historical information. A book liked *Forged* can unsettle people who have no third or fourth opinions to draw upon.”

Ehrman, a former fundamentalist who is now an agnostic, hopes that *Forged* will help people accept what it took him a long time to do. “The New Testament wasn’t written by the finger of God—it has human fingerprints all over its pages.”

1. <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/13/half-of-new-testament-forged-bible-scholar-says/?iref=obnetwork>

Ed. Note: In the spirit of disclosure—like Bart Ehrman, I attended Moody Bible Institute, going on to further Christian studies and seminary. Like him, writings in the genre often called The Search for the Historical Jesus, was a crucial spark in my journey to seek truth, however it might manifest itself.



FOCUS ON FREEDOM

Snow Job In The Sunshine State

This first article consists of excerpts from a lead article in the September 2011 issue of *Church & State*, the monthly journal of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. As you may know, this organization is headed by ministers, but welcomes and receives much support from the humanist and other civil liberties communities.

Staff writer Sandhya Bathija relates how Rabbi Merrill Shapiro has spent the past few years battling proposed taxpayer aid to religious schools and other ministries in Florida.

Shapiro, president of the Americans United Board of Trustees, doesn't think public funding of religious organizations benefits religion or government, particularly public schools.

"Who should decide how Florida residents' hard-earned dollars are spent on religious organizations?" Shapiro asked recently. "Should it be the government or they as individuals? Now, there are some who say that by asking that question we are hostile to religion. But nothing could be further from the truth Passage of Amendment 7 would open the floodgates, harm our public schools and alter the landscape for religious schools and separation of church and state as well."

Shapiro was responding to the Florida legislature's passage of HJR 1471, the so-called "Religious Freedom Act." If approved by voters in November 2012, it would repeal the state constitution's "no-aid" provision barring public funds for religion and could dramatically reshape church-state relations in the Sunshine State.

Shapiro has joined forces with other religious leaders, civil liberties activists and public education allies to ensure that Floridians know the true effect of passing Amendment 7. They

filed a lawsuit on July 20 challenging the deceptively worded measure, arguing that it misleads voters.

The *Church & State* article continues with this assertion: The ballot language would lead voters to think that the amendment enhances religious liberty when it does just the opposite by repealing constitutional safeguards that protect taxpayers and ensure that religious entities remain independent from government.

Shapiro warned that a repeal of the no-aid provision can only lead to religious institutions becoming excessively entangled with government.

"It's a thicket they can't get out of. Once you take that money, the government can make stipulations," he told the *Florida Independent*.

Amendment 7 Would Force Taxpayers To Fund Religion, Not Advance Religious Freedom, Lawsuit Says

Shapiro, who serves as rabbi of Temple Shalom in Deltona, is lead plaintiff in the lawsuit. Others

include the Rev. Harry Parrott, a retired Baptist minister and president of the AU Clay County Chapter, and the Rev. Harold Brockus of St. Petersburg, president of the South Pinellas AU Chapter and retired pastor of a Pinellas Park congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ.

Other plaintiffs include the Rev. Kent Siladi of Rockledge, conference minister for the Florida Conference of United Church of Christ; Rabbi Jack Romberg of Temple Israel in Tallahassee; and the Rev. Bobby Musengwa, pastor of Maximo Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg.

Leaders of the Florida Education Association, Florida School Boards Association and Florida Association of School Administrators are also serving as plaintiffs.

The lawsuit was filed by Americans United, the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the ACLU Foundation of Florida, the Anti-Defamation League, the Florida Education Association and the National Education Association.

As the proposed language stands now, when Floridians receive their

ballots in 2012, they will see a title for Amendment 7 that reads simply, "Religious Freedom." The summary will read, "Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to provide, consistent with the United States Constitution, that no individual or entity may be denied, on the basis of religious identity or belief, governmental benefits, funding, or other support and to delete the prohibition against using revenues from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution."

The lawsuit asserts that this ballot language is misleading; the amendment, it asserts, will not make provisions in the Florida Constitution consistent with the U.S. Constitution because it would give religious institutions greater access to tax funds than the U.S. Constitution does.

Read the entire article, which presents both the pro and con arguments for this constitutional amendment, at <http://www.au.org/media/church-and-state/archives/2011/09/snow-job-in-the-sunshine.html>

A Lakeland—actually, a Florida—Freethought Victory

A benefit concert held in Lakeland on Aug. 28 for EllenBeth Wachs, the embattled church/state separation activist, turned into a celebration when she announced that trumped-up criminal charges against her had been dismissed: Prosecutors conceded that it was not in their best interest to move forward to trial and offered a settlement agreement that dismissed the felonies and averted convictions on all charges.

According to an August 29 AoffF news release:

The arrests were meant as part of a retaliatory strategy by Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd to suppress her activism in church/state separation matters, which she had directed at his transfer of jail basketball goals to area churches. Judd, an outspoken evangelical Christian who has stated that he is on a "mission from god," keeps a Bible prominently displayed on his sheriff's office desk.

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Focus on Freedom

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EllenBeth stated, "Mr. Judd's despicable actions against me shined a bright spotlight on the intolerance and bigotry that atheists face every day. The secular community around the world came out in force to support me and speak out against this persecution. His abuse of power angered and mobilized the atheist movement to action reminiscent of an earlier civil rights era."

EllenBeth, president of the Humanists of Florida Association as well as the legal affairs coordinator and vice-president for Atheists of Florida, recently wrote, "Now that this is over I can get a lot more focused. ... [I]t is a big relief to be a 'free' woman."

Polk Under Prayer (PUP)

PUP. Puppy? No, it's the opposite of a cute, cuddly puppy. Instead, it's a group that personifies U.S. Dominionism, by the name of "Polk Under Prayer" (*aka* "PUP"). This association of political leaders and Fundamentalist/Protestant churches/freelance Evangelical preachers in Polk County, Florida, has stated as part of its mission: "If they will not submit to God's way of living, then the prayer is to have them incarcerated or removed from the county" (presumably any resident or guest within Polk County, Florida).

A defining "Polk Under Prayer" event was held at Polk County's Highland Park Church of the Nazarene on March 1, 2011.

The event's "stars" featured ... Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd ... Lakeland Mayor Gow Fields ... Polk County School Supt. Sherrie Nickell ... and event organizers: freelance evangelical preachers Richard Gerringswald and Tim Williams.

The web page for Frank Smith Ministries [Winter Haven] puts forth how Tim Williams and Pastor Frank have been called to carry out the PUP project.

It's [*sic*] objective is to place Holy Angels at all roads that lead

into or out of Polk County. A strip of anointed oil has been placed over all lanes of highway at the county line and a prayer has been given at each location asking God to have angels inspect every vehicle that travels into or out of this county and to bring under conviction to those who seek evil and we asked God to bring them to a state of submission and repentance. If they will not submit to God's way of living, then the prayer is to have them incarcerated or removed from the county... We are asking God to make His presence known when each person crosses this anointed line. The results were immediate. There have been a number of arrests for drugs and drug manufacturing in Polk County since this project began. ... We encourage people to do the same with their drive ways and property lines.

The church is commanded to be the body of Christ and take the lead in the battle against Satan.

Don't just talk about Spritual [*sic*] Warfare in your Church, DO IT!

God has given His children the authority through Christ!

Further, on its Facebook page, *The Christian Churches of Polk County* we read: "Lakeland Mayor

Gow Fields, School Supt. Dr. Sherrie Nickell, and Sheriff Grady Judd. They are coming on board with enthusi-

asm. Each representative touches three major factors in our county: Government, Education and Law Enforcement." (January 27 at 8:41pm)

Compare this Facebook statement (*i.e.*, "Government, Education and Law Enforcement") to a quote by well-known national Dominionist, David Barton: "There's five areas that you have to be able to influence and control if you are going to take a culture and that's media, business, government, education, and pulpit." (Atheists of Florida [online] forum)

It's Here! The Lakeland UUCL hUUmanists



THE LAKE- LAND UUCL hUUmanist group has finally arrived.

Their first meeting will be held on

Sunday October 2nd at 2 pm.

Future meetings will be scheduled for the 1st and 3rd Sundays of every month at 2pm. Their coordinator assures us that: We'll discuss topics ranging from ethics and environmentalism to politics and the community.

We'll also run small scale experiments for hands-on activities, and from time to time we'll watch movies.

At the first meeting—noted above—we'll introduce ourselves to one another. We'll talk and gather ideas of each person's expectations as to how our organization can add to the community at UUCL.

There is no God

Don't believe everything you hear

THIS TEXT WAS SEEN on billboards created by McElroy Road Church of Christ in Mansfield, Ohio. Not too strangely, many people assumed they had been put up by a local atheist group.

This August, the church posted six billboards—which also included the church's website and logo—around Richland County, and also rented a digital sign. Their intent was to honor God, point people to the church's new website, and just get people to "stop and think."

Frank Moore, the church pastor, was not surprised at the confusion, though he didn't expect so much attention.

"Anytime you do something for the Lord...you know that not everyone will totally understand what you're doing. I think you have to know that going into anything like this," he told *The Christian Post*, adding, "I'd say that we're in a culture that does not read and think critically, as we should."

We laud that forward-looking pastor!

Dominion Theology is a grouping of theological systems with the common belief that the law of God—as codified in the Bible—should exclusively govern society, to the exclusion of secular law ...

Refractory Jesus Myth

Continued from p. 1

tions into the subject have often been done by non-theologians, who avoid the bias of Christian investigators. Research continues to accumulate since 1778, but seldom does any of this information reach the public, and the small amount that does is usually downplayed and belittled by the media and religious leaders.

Personally, as one who attended many Protestant churches early in my life, I accepted the fact that Jesus was a historical figure without question, much like the 2.2 billion Christians in the world today. Even when I began to research and question my religious beliefs, I found it difficult to believe that so many people could have been deceived about Jesus' existence for so long. But, as the accumulated body of evidence now clearly shows, they have definitely been deceived.

Many people who have looked at a portion of the modern evidence on a historical Jesus have concluded that surely there was at least a wandering Jewish religious teacher named Jesus Christ who perhaps had a small cult following and that onto this actual historical figure a heavy layer of mythology was added. But a review of all the evidence indicates there was no person at all behind the myth.

I've seen no studies on why the public doesn't know about the lack of evidence of a historical Jesus. Nevertheless, we can do some reasonable speculating. An obvious reason is that this information never reaches the public. Even some freethinkers (not members of our group, of course) are unaware of some of this information.

A number of reasons come to mind as to why this research is repressed: the media are mainly composed of believers; many people employed in the religious field might lose their jobs; often the public doesn't want to hear evidence that contradicts their cherished beliefs; many feel that people would run amuck without a religious basis for ethics; much of the information is in books, and the current frenetic pace of daily life

leaves some feeling they don't have time to read an entire book.

There is a paucity of articles covering the subject completely and concisely. I hope this article will provide such a source.

After reading this article, some of you may be motivated to follow-up with these essential books for free-thinkers: *Did Jesus Exist?* By G.A. Wells, first published in Great Britain in 1975, revised edition published in 1986; *The Jesus Puzzle*, by Earl Doherty, first published in Canada in 1999 and reprinted in 2000 and 2001; *The Jesus The Jews Never Knew* by Frank Zindler, published in the U.S. in 2003.

If you have time for only one of these books, read *The Jesus Puzzle*, which is comprehensive, written in an accessible style, and elaborates on evidence originally presented in the more academic *Did Jesus Exist?* Frank Zindler's masterful *The Jesus The Jews Never Knew* wraps up the package so convincingly that it is hard to think that any rational fair-minded person would come away thinking there was a historical Jesus.

Now let's proceed with evidence that Jesus Christ never existed as a flesh and blood human-being (more accurately, *lack of evidence*):

Savior Gods.

Many Christians believe the Jesus stories in the *New Testament* were unique. The fact that these stories were remarkably similar to those of previous savior gods has been a source of embarrassment to Christianity since its inception. One explanation the early Christian founders offered for the striking similarities was that the devil had gone back in history and planted the stories.

There were as many as 29 savior gods before Jesus Christ. Examples of a few of them are: Attis (Phrygia); Horus (Egypt)—described in detail below; Krishna (India); Marduk (Babylonia); Mithra (Persia). A standardized form could be constructed listing the identical elements in the stories of these savior gods, and the name of Jesus or any one of these gods could often be interchanged at the top of the list.

Horus, an Egyptian savior god, who

was worshipped thousands of years before the time of Jesus, will serve as an example of the remarkable similarities in life events between Jesus and the savior gods. Horus was considered to be the son of two major Egyptian deities, the god Osiris and the goddess Isis.

Horus and Jesus (Horus is listed first when there are any differences) shared these life events: conception (virgin birth); father (only begotten son of a god, Orsiris and Jehovah); similar mother's names (Meri and Mary); foster father (Jo-Seph and Joseph); foster father's ancestry (royal descent); birth location (in a cave



and in a cave or stable); annunciation (by an angel to each mother); birth heralded (by a star); birth dates (birth celebrated at time of winter solstice—typically December 21—and December 25); birth announcements (angels); birth witnesses (shepherds); later witnesses to birth (three solar deities and three wise men); death threat during infancy (Herut tried to have Horus murdered and Herod tried to have Jesus murdered); age at rite of passage ritual (12); break in life history (between ages 12 and 30); baptism locations (in the river Eridanus and in the river Jordan); age at baptism (30); baptised by (Anup the Baptiser and John the Baptist); subsequent fate of baptiser (beheaded); close followers (twelve disciples); performed miracles (often identical ones such as walking on water and raising the dead); key address (sermon on the mount); method of death (crucifixion); crucifixion companions (two thieves); burial (in a tomb); fate after death (resurrected after three days); resurrection announced by (women); future (reign for 1,000 years). In addition to this list of striking similarities in life events, another comparably long and tedious list can be constructed of personal

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Refractory Jesus Myth

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characteristics of Horus and Jesus, but I think by now you get the picture.

Miracles.

Clear evidence of mythology is provided by stories that incorporate miracles. There are many such stories in the story of Jesus. The occurrence of a single miracle has never been documented by science, nor would we expect it to be—a fundamental premise of science is that the Universe operates only by natural laws.

Historians.

Not one historian, Jewish, Greek, or Roman, who allegedly lived at the same time as Christ, mentioned him. And there were plenty of them, erudite and skilled, who wrote about everything, trivial and profound. Any mention of Christ by a historian occurred *after* Christ's supposed earthly existence and was therefore Christian hearsay provided to historians or fraudulent Christian insertions in texts.

This total lack of mention is particularly noteworthy since, according to the Gospels, Christ was known far and wide. The Gospels tell numerous times about the masses of people that Jesus attracted. For example, Matthew 4:25 states: "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him."

Epistles.

The New Testament epistles, misleadingly placed after the Gospels, were letters written on a specific subject that could be just dashed off, or sometimes were composed with polish, or even sometimes were well-written treatises. Although the epistles were written closest to the time that Jesus allegedly lived, they made no mention of an earthly Jesus.

Paul is given credit for founding Christianity; 13 of the 22 epistles have been ascribed to him, although the authentic number is 7 or even less. He never saw nor knew a human Christ. His Christ was strictly a spiritual entity modeled after the savior gods.

Gospels.

Christian churches have traditionally portrayed the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the work of four of Christ's disciples and are called the "Synoptic Gospels." Critical biblical research has revealed that each Gospel was written by one or more anonymous authors, none of whom was a disciple of Christ or an eyewitness to him. Also, about 50 inconsistent gospels were widely circulated in the early Christian movement, but only the four "Synoptic Gospels" were selected from the approximately 50 by Paul's Christianity.

Many biblical researchers put the dating of Mark, the first Gospel, at no earlier than 70 CE and the last, John, at around 140 CE. The first historical mention of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke by a Christian founder, St. Irenaeus, was about 190 CE.

Mark, which was written at least forty years after the alleged death of Christ, is especially noteworthy since it is the first time a human Jesus was described. It was written in a bare-bones manner, and the author(s) of Matthew and Luke largely copied the sparse information from Mark and embellished it. John, the last one written, is quite different from the other three. It describes long theological discourses by Jesus that could not be literal words from a historical Jesus, and it contradicts the other three Gospels.

In Earl Doherty's brilliant masterpiece, *The Jesus Puzzle*, he explains how a mythical Christ was created: "All the Gospels derive their basic story of Jesus of Nazareth from one source: whoever wrote the Gospel of Mark The Gospels are not historical accounts, but constructed through a process of 'midrash,' a Jewish method of reworking old Biblical passages and tales to reflect new beliefs Well into the second century, many Christian documents lack or reject the notion of a human man as an element of their faith. Only gradually did the Jesus of Nazareth portrayed in the Gospels come to be accepted as historical.

Relics.

Historical figures usually leave behind some relics that attest to their earthy existence. In the case of Jesus, we come up with a big zero. Items of clothing, tools, documents that he wrote or signed, eating utensils, nails or pieces of wood from the cross, a cup from the Last Supper, a thorn from the bloody crown—none of these items or any others were ever scientifically authenticated (although there was a lively market in phony items).

Nazareth.

Christ in the Gospels is often referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. There is a major problem with this designation. Nazareth did not exist until well after the second century CE.

Name.

Jesus Christ is not the name of a specific individual. Christ is not a last name. It is simply the Greek name for "Messiah" or "anointed one." Joshua would have been a better translation of Yeshua than Jesus, and Joshua was a very common first name at the time lacking any historical specificity. Religious claims that reside exclusively in a supernatural realm often can not be clearly confirmed or refuted by critical biblical research and scientific investigations. But when the claims reside in the material world, they usually can be confirmed or refuted convincingly. Such is the case with the claim of Jesus Christ being a historical person. It is difficult to imagine on reviewing the evidence available currently that any intelligent, objective person could still believe that Jesus Christ ever existed as an actual historic figure. Nevertheless, I feel sure that most people who depend on faith for the confirmation of their conclusions will continue to fervently believe that he was historical.

Nonetheless, I think those who have reached rational conclusions on this subject have an obligation to try to convey this information to the public, since many are completely unaware of the current research findings. Eventually, I hope many people will feel that living a life based on mythology is living a lie and is unacceptable.

Onward Christian Soldiers?

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absolutely stimulating. It is one of those that I would bring to your attention here.

In his entries beginning on March 12, 1906, Twain describes in his own inimitable way a piece of history which seems frighteningly relevant for us today. I am referring to what historians frequently call the Moro Crater Massacre. [10; 12]As Twain explains, "This incident burst upon the world last Friday in an official cablegram from the commander of our forces in the Philippines to our Government at Washington." [403. Bracketed numbers in italics indicate pages in his *Autobiography*.] He then summarizes the cable's contents.

"A tribe of Moros [Muslims], dark skinned savages, had fortified themselves in the bowl of an extinct crater not many miles from Jolo; and as they were hostiles, and bitter against us because we have been trying for eight years to take their liberties away from them, their presence in that position was a menace. Our commander, General Leonard Wood, ordered a reconnaissance. It was found that the Moros numbered six hundred, counting women and children; that their crater bowl was in the summit of a peak or mountain twenty-two hundred feet above sea level, and very difficult of access for Christian troops and artillery. Then General Wood ordered a surprise, and went along himself to see the order carried out. Our troops climbed the heights by devious and difficult trails, and even took some artillery with them. The kind of artillery is not specified, but in one place it was hoisted up a sharp acclivity by tackle a distance of some three hundred feet. Arrived at the rim of the crater, the battle began. Our soldiers numbered five hundred and forty. They were assisted by auxiliaries consisting of a detachment of native constabulary in our pay—their numbers not given—and by a naval detachment, whose numbers are not stated. But apparently the contending parties

were about equal as to number—six hundred men on our side, on the edge of the bowl; six hundred men, women and children in the bottom of the bowl. Depth of the bowl, fifty feet." [403]

According to Twain, General Wood's order was, "Kill or capture the six hundred." [403]



The engagement was officially called a "battle" and it began, says Twain, with "our forces firing down into the crater with their artillery and their deadly small arms of precision; the savages furiously returning the fire, probably with brickbats—though [he adds] this is merely a surmise of mine... [since]

heretofore the Moros have used knives and clubs mainly; also ineffectual trademuskets when they had any." [403]

Twain notes that "the official report stated that the battle was fought with prodigious energy on both sides during a day and a half, and that it ended with a complete victory for the American arms. The completeness of the victory is established by this fact: that of the six hundred Moros not one was left alive. The brilliancy of the victory is established by this other fact, to wit: that of our six hundred heroes only fifteen lost their lives." [403]

Not at all impressed by our side's tactics, Twain comments that "apparently our little army considered that the 'or' [in Wood's order] left them authorized to kill *or* capture according to taste, and that their taste had remained what it has been for eight years, in our army out there—the taste of Christian butchers." [404]

With his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, Twain notes that "the official report quite properly extolled and magnified the 'heroism' and 'gallantry' of our troops; lamented the loss of the fifteen who perished, and elaborated the wounds of thirty--two

of our men who suffered injury, and even minutely and faithfully described the nature of the wounds, in the interest of future historians of the United States. It mentioned that a private had one of his elbows scraped by a missile, and the private's name was mentioned. Another private had the end of his nose scraped by a missile. His name was also mentioned—by cable, at one dollar and fifty cents a word." [404]

Twain then considers this battle in light of "the great battles of the Civil War" and "the pathetic comedy called the Cuban war" in both of which, he says, "we left an average of 2 *per cent* of the enemy killed or crippled on the field." In contrast, at Moro, "we abolished them utterly, leaving not even a baby alive to cry for its dead mother. *This is incomparably the greatest victory that was ever achieved by the Christian soldiers of the United States.*" [404, his italics.]

His pen dripping with sarcasm, Twain then points out that while all of this "splendid news" was repeated and expanded upon in every newspaper for the next two days, "there was not a single reference to it in the editorial columns of anyone of those newspapers" nor were there any letters to the editors making reference to it. [404]

"So far as I can find out," Twain writes, "there was only one person among our eighty millions who allowed himself the privilege of a public remark on this great occasion—that was the President of the United States" who was duty bound to say something and to do so within the limits of tradition and convention. Thus, to Wood, Theodore Roosevelt publically wrote: "I congratulate you and the officers and men of your command upon the brilliant feat of arms wherein you and they so well upheld the honor of the American flag." Though Twain comments that "this utterance cost [Roosevelt] more pain and shame than any other that ever issued from his pen or his mouth," he continues, "[Roosevelt's] whole utterance is merely a convention. Not a word of what he said came out of his heart. He knew perfectly well that to pen six hundred helpless and

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weaponless savages in a hole like rats in a trap and massacre them in detail during a stretch of a day and a half, from a safe position on the heights above, was no brilliant feat of arms—and would not have been a brilliant feat of arms even if Christian America, represented by its salaried soldiers, had shot them down with Bibles and the Golden Rule instead of bullets. He knew perfectly well that our uniformed assassins had *not* upheld the honor of the American flag, but had done as they have been doing continuously for eight years in the Philippines—that is to say, they had dishonored it.” [405]

On Sunday, the headlines began to change. One read, “WOMEN SLAIN IN MORO SLAUGHTER.” Twain applauds the appropriateness of that last word. The subheading reads: “*With Children They Mixed in Mob in Crater, and All Died Together.*” [405] Of this Twain writes:

“They were mere naked savages, and yet there is a sort of pathos about it when that word *children* falls under your eye, for it always brings before us our perfectest symbol of innocence and helplessness; and by help of its deathless eloquence color, creed and nationality vanish away and we see only that they are children—merely children. And if they are frightened and crying and in trouble, our pity goes out to them by natural impulse. We see a picture. We see the small forms. We see the terrified faces. We see the tears. We see the small hands clinging in supplication to the mother; but we do not see those children that we are speaking about. We see in their places the little creatures whom we know and love.” [405]

Twain writes of another headline that “blazes with American and Christian glory like to the sun in the zenith: ‘*Death List is Now 900.*’” Of it he says, “I was never so enthusiastically proud of the flag till now!” [406]

Another heading, he says, “explains how safely our daring soldiers were located. It says: ‘*Impossible to Tell Sexes Apart in Fierce Battle on Top of Mount Dajo.*’” He continues, “The

naked savages were so far away, down in the bottom of that trap, that our soldiers could not tell the breasts of a woman from the rudimentary paps of a man—so far away that they couldn’t tell a toddling little child from a black six-footer. *This was by all odds the least dangerous battle that Christian soldiers of any nationality were ever engaged in.*” [406, his italics.]

Another headline read, “*Fighting for Four Days*” (instead of a day and a half), about which Twain remarks: “It was a long and happy picnic [for our men] with nothing to do but sit in comfort and fire the Golden Rule into those people down there and imagine letters to write home to the admiring families, and pile glory upon glory. Those savages fighting for their liberties had the four days too, but it must have been a sorrowful time for them.” [406]

There is also a heading which declares, “*Lieutenant Johnson Blown from Parapet by Exploding Artillery Gallantly Leading Charge.*” Twain notes that “Lieutenant Johnson has pervaded the cablegrams from the first” and then says, “The official dispatches do not know which to admire most, Johnson’s adorable wound or the nine hundred murders.” Indeed, Johnson’s wound “has made a great deal more noise in the world than has any similarly colossal event since ‘Humpty Dumpty’ fell off the wall and got injured.” Since reports claimed he was hurt by an exploding shell—and the Moro’s had no artillery—Twain concludes that “the only officer of ours who acquired a wound of advertising dimensions got it at our hands, not the enemy’s. It seems more than probable that if we had placed our soldiers out of the way of our own weapons, we should have come out of the most extraordinary battle in all history without a scratch.” [406]

Though Twain has much more to say about this battle, I’ll mention only one item.

In his dispatches home, General Wood spoke of the “desperate hand-to-hand fight” at the crater. Twain says of this that Wood did not seem “to suspect that he was giving

himself away, as the phrase goes, since if there was any very desperate hand-to-hand fighting it would necessarily happen that nine hundred hand-to-hand fighters, if really desperate, would surely be able to kill more than fifteen of our men before their last man and woman and child perished.” [407] Moreover, Twain points out, “if there was so much hand-to-hand fighting there must have arrived a time, toward the end of the four days’ butchery, when only one native was left alive. We had six hundred men present; we had lost only fifteen; why did the six hundred kill that remaining man—or woman, or child?” [408]

Given such comments, is it any wonder why Mark Twain insisted that his *Autobiography* not be published until a hundred years after his death (which occurred on April 21, 1910)? [1]

I don’t claim that Twain’s account of the Moro Crater Massacre is correct in all respects. That is for historians to debate.

What concerns me and should concern everyone, however, is the viewpoint Twain’s comments reveal, namely, that some (on either side) could and did take that conflict as being motivated, at least in part, by *religious*, rather than by purely military, motives. Many can and do take a similar view of this nation’s current conflicts.

In recent decades American presidents have been careful to make explicit declarations that our nation is not at war with the religion of Islam. Without wishing to be too cynical, I would urge such statements to be taken *cum grano salis*. Why? Two reasons.

First, I recall some famous presidential statements that were, well, dubious, to say the least: From George H. W. Bush, “Read my lips: no new taxes!” [5] From Bill Clinton, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky!” [6] From Richard Nixon, “I am not a crook!” [13] Need I go on?

Second, whether or not our presidents are engaged in some kind of holy war, the fact has been shown that many of our military leaders have been

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and that many of our nation's other officials have explicitly held that the United States of America is a Christian nation despite all the evidence to the contrary. [16]

For example, as far back as Twain's days, U.S. Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer held, in 1891, "This is a Christian nation." [8:73; 9:846]

More recently, in 2003, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, Army Lieutenant General William Boykin testified before Congress about America's War on Terrorism. One of the things he said was this: "The battle that we're in is a spiritual battle. Satan wants to destroy this nation. He wants to destroy us as a nation, and he wants to destroy us as a Christian army." [19] Boykin also appeared in uniform before church groups and told them not only that this is a "Christian nation," but also that President Bush was "appointed by God" and that Muslims worship "an idol." [7]

In 2006, seven Army and Air Force officers appeared in uniform in a promotional video for an evangelical Christian organization called "The Christian Embassy." It evangelizes military leaders, politicians and diplomats in Washington, D.C. In the video, Air Force Maj. Gen. Jack J. Catton, Jr., said, "I'm an old-fashioned American, and my first priority is my faith in [the Christian] God, then my family and then country." [7]

As I have argued in these pages before, America is not a Christian nation. [16] Even if it were, that would not justify our country being at war with any religion, not even Islam. There are over one billion Muslims in the world today, with over seven million of them here in the United States. [1; 2:73] The vast majority of them are peaceful, tolerant individuals who are "appalled" and "horrified" by what a few fanatical "Islamists" (i.e., militant terrorists) have done not only to us and others, but to their own religion of Islam. [3:39; 11:43; 14:1f., 69, 212; 1]

If the call, "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" ever arises again—as it did during the Crusades and at other

times—then those making it will have truly "run amok." That would be something that Mark Twain would have found sad, ironic humor in, for you see, in the "battle" he discussed, that very term was what was claimed to have happened to the Moros: they ran amok and it was that which led to their deaths at the Crater Massacre! [10; 15]

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Getting the Imperial out of Imperial Polk County

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Here in Lakeland, Wachs founded and heads a business: UnCommon Artistry, Inc. an e-commerce jewelry supply business.

On the activist side, her resume is amazing. She is vice president and Legal Affairs Coordinator for Atheists of Florida; Founder and Director of the AofFL Lakeland Chapter from 2009.

In January 2010, EllenBeth founded SOS Tampa Bay (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) and personally facilitates its regularly scheduled meetings. (See, page 11 for notice of this organization.)

In 2011, she became President of Humanists of Florida Association.

I started to list the many freethought, civil liberties and just plain charitable organizations to which EllenBeth belongs, but I ran out of room for them in this article, so I will just direct you to http://www.floridahumanist.org/membercms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177:president-ellenbeth-wachs&catid=55:leadership&Itemid=85 for your information.

An effective activist in church/state separation issues, she, along with Atheists of Florida, is the plaintiff in groundbreaking Florida constitutional litigation against the city of Lakeland. This has brought persecution on her by the Christian-bent politics in Polk County. And, yes, that little three-letter designation of "Esq." is playing a part!

Over a dozen SWAT-garbed sheriff's deputies entered her home to arrest this gentle retired attorney. They searched the home and her computers, holding her two business employees at gunpoint for several hours, then finally confiscating documents that included information about the sheriff's illegal activities. This was just one of two arrests this year.

We are honored that she has made time to come talk with HAWCF this month. Treasure the exciting story you will hear, along with the challenge she will put to you. Invite your friends to witness this Lakeland history living in front of you!

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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 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

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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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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

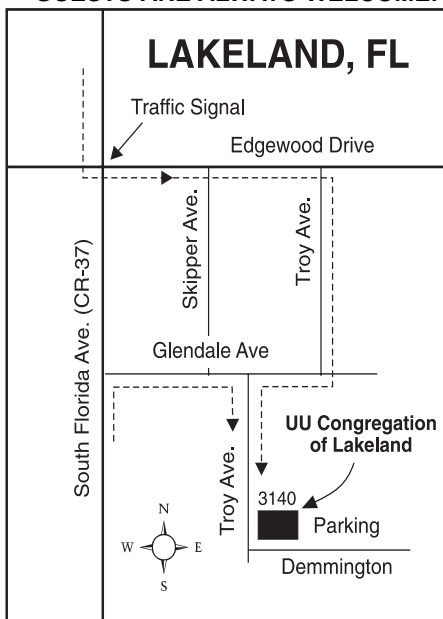
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

WHEN AND WHERE?

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

See map below.

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



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 6:00 pm.

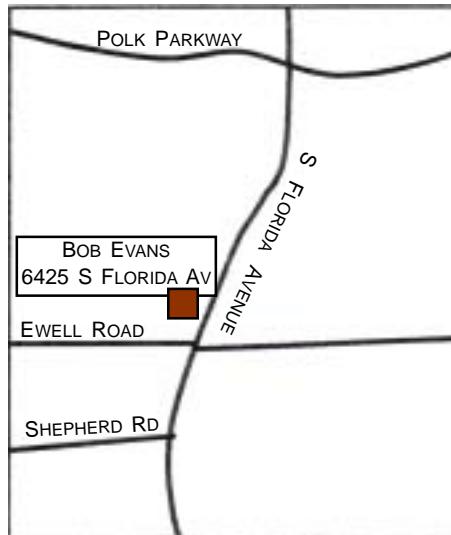


WHERE:

Bob Evans Restaurant ...

located at 6425 S Florida Avenue in Lakeland. 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 currently on hiatus, but be sure to visit the online web site for updates at <http://sostampabay.org>. To contact a person for information, email Info@AtheistsofFlorida.org or leave a message at 813.919-9161.

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.

Summer-Fall 2011

Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

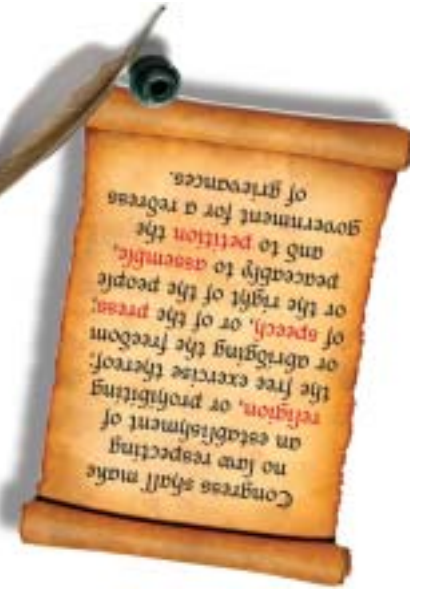
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