

# Humanist CommonSense

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

## Religulous [The Movie]

**Come on out & join us—  
Tuesday, June 15, 7 pm at the  
Lakeland UUCL** (see map pg. 11)

SOME PEOPLE LOVE IT. Some hate it. Most do a little of both. Above all—as with many things “Bill Maher”—most of us laugh at it. A lot. With summer pleasures coming on, this may be the ideal kick-off to a season of lightness, but including time for reflection as well.

The documentary (some have called it a “shockumentary”) follows comedian Bill Maher as he travels around the globe interviewing people about God and religion. One reviewer notes: “Known for his astute analytical skills, irreverent wit and commitment to never pulling a punch, Maher brings his characteristic honesty to an unusual spiritual journey.” Well, probably not a “spiritual journey” where Maher is concerned.



Maher spends most of the movie challenging believers—asking pastors and laypeople why they believe myths not in the Bible, like the virgin birth; or ignore tenets that do, like Christ’s admonishments of the rich. He outs the newer belief systems of Mormonism and Scientology, asking if they’re any weirder than the ones we know most about (“God impregnated a virgin with a son who was also God Himself, and sent him on a suicide mission so he could fly back into space!”).

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## Are Priests That Sexually Abuse Children Pedophiles?

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

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A FUNDAMENTAL AND ESSENTIAL STEP in reaching a valid conclusion is starting with a clear and authoritative definition. And nowhere is this point clearer than in the media coverage of the sexual abuse of children by priests. The media have regularly referred to “pedophile priests” in the coverage of this crime although most of the perpetrators do not fit the description of pedophiles. This lack of a precise definition has led to fuzzy thinking and erroneous conclusions as to the cause of the abuse.

The authoritative source to use in the United States to find a definition of a mental disorder is *The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)*. The manual provides a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders. It is used in the United States

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## Upward and Outward

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.]

LET ME ASK YOU A PERSONAL QUESTION: “Do you have any eccentricities, little foibles that you might hesitate about confessing to others?” That’s a rhetorical question, of course. I don’t expect an answer.

But, as for myself: I’m willing to confess to one peculiarity. When I’m travelling on a vacation and come across some hole in the ground, I feel an irresistible compulsion to get in it! Not just any hole, mind you. It must be a spectacular void to attract my attention: deep and dark, mysterious and beautiful—and safe!

Fortunately, America has many such holes strategically located so as not to inconvenience the weary traveller. There are the Black Hills of South Dakota. In Virginia there are the Luray, the Grand, and the Endless Caverns. Tennessee has the Cumberland and Raccoon Mountain Caverns. The wonderful Mammoth

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## CALENDAR

### June–September 2010

June 14 ..... Humanist Dinner

**New Location—Fred’s Southern Market: See Info & Map on p. 11**

June 15 ..... Regular Meeting

July 12 ..... Humanist Dinner

August 9 ..... Humanist Dinner

**No regular meetings in July & August**

September 13 ..... Humanist Dinner

September 21 ..... Regular Meeting



## FOCUS ON FREEDOM

### More Mis-Education in Texas

DID YOU KNOW THAT MEDIEVAL CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHER ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Protestant theologian John Calvin, and conservative British law scholar William Blackstone, all had more influence on the founding and intellectual origins of the United States than Thomas Jefferson—a major contributor to the Declaration of Independence, co-author of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, and fourth president of the country? No? Then perhaps you should go back to school—that is, to school in Texas!

There—if conservatives on the Texas School Board [SBOE] have their way—Jefferson hardly will be mentioned as a founder. Instead, you will be taught that the founding fathers were guided by strict Christian beliefs in setting up our government. (Thomas Jefferson's 1814 letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper surely will be hidden away—he wrote that America's system of laws was derived from English common law, Jefferson stated: "Christianity neither is, nor ever was part of the common law." In the same letter, he denied that the Ten Commandments were part of English or American common law "..... because they never were made so by legislative authority.")

Socially conservative Board Member Don McLeroy led a push to cast doubt on separation of church and state when the Board rewrote proposed curriculum standards for public school social studies. According to the *Washington Post*, McLeroy told a gathering of Tea Party activists, "Our students will be taught that this country was founded on biblical principles."

Protests are coming from many



sides: historians, civil rights and religious freedom groups, educators, etc. The Texas Freedom Network, which battled with Texas' SBOE over science standards last year, is protesting the actions of McLeroy and his ultra-conservatives.

McLeroy lost his seat in a recent primary election, but won't actually leave the board until after the November general election

In April, students rallied at the University of Texas to protest the proposed changes. Headed by a coalition called Save Our History!, the group stated that the State Board of Education is "rewriting the history of the civil rights and women's rights movements and distorting the role of religion in American history," that, indeed, the Board is putting opinion into history books.

Several hundred people also attended a protest in Austin on May 16, sponsored by the American Atheists. Christopher Hitchens told the crowd:

Without Thomas Jefferson and his Declaration of Independence, there would have been no American revolution that announced universal principles of liberty. Without his participation by the side of the unforgettable Marquis de Lafayette, there would have been no French proclamation of The Rights of Man. Without his brilliant negotiation of the Louisiana treaty, there would be no United States of America. Without Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, there would have been no Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, and no basis for the most precious clause of our most prized element of our imperishable Bill of Rights—the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Hitchens went on to qualify his remarks: "We make no saint of Thomas Jefferson—we leave the mindless business of canonization and the worship of humans to the fanatics."

He closed with a rousing cry: "We inherited these principles and these freedoms and we here highly resolve that we shall pass them on, as we will pass on an undivided Republic purged of racism and slavery ...

[accompanied by a] mounting chorus that demands: 'Mr Jefferson! BUILD UP THAT WALL.'"

Not all the changes are bad. It's actually more accurate to describe our American government as a "constitutional republic" rather than "democratic". And adding a statement by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to accompany a speech by the U.S. President Abraham Lincoln is not necessarily a bad thing.

The thing is, history should not be taught with either a conservative or liberal explanation, but emphasizing events and their contemporary influences. Of course, the events and influences we do or do not include also add their own interpretive slant. Not to worry—the Texas State Board of Education is *uber* busy with their slicing and dicing.

Alas—the Texas State School Board voted their final approval on Friday, May 21, 2010, to these social-studies pseudo-standards. But stay tuned. We will be continuing to follow this topic ... Especially as this influence is all too likely to multiply.

### Judicial Mischief in California

"WE'RE ON A MISSION FROM GOD," proclaims a group of conservative California attorneys. God's mandate to them: Replace four sitting California judges with Christian candidates. This unusual challenge is turning what is usually a snooze-button election into what both sides call "a battle for the integrity of U.S. courts."

Vowing to be "God's ambassadors on the bench", the Associated Press reports that the four San Diego Superior Court challengers are backed by pastors, gun enthusiasts, and opponents of abortion and same-sex marriages.

Candidate Craig Candelore, a family law attorney, contended: "We believe our country is under assault and needs Christian values. ... Unfortunately, God has called upon us to do this only with the judiciary." (At least, for now, and in this race—see, below).

In California, one of only 33 states that directly elects judges, challenges are rarely heard. Critics charge that the June 8 campaign is aimed at packing

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## Are Priests That Sexually Abuse Children Pedophiles?

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and in varying degrees around the world by clinicians, researchers, psychiatric drug regulation agencies, health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, and policy makers. There have been five revisions since it was first published in 1952. The last major revision was the fourth edition (DSM-IV), and a "text revision" was produced in 2000 of the fourth edition.

The definition of *pedophilia* in the latest DSM is as follows:

Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 years or younger);

The person has acted on these sexual urges, or the sexual urges or phantasies cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty;

The person is at least age 16 years and at least 5 years older than the child or children in criterion A.

For the rest of this essay I'll use the above definition of pedophilia. In the media, in law enforcement, and in general usage, the term "pedophile" has inaccurately been used to describe any type of sexual abuse of a minor. But the sexual abusers of minors fit into multiple categories, and pedophiles are relatively rare.

Research into the causes of pedophilia are ongoing and preliminary. Beginning in 2002, researchers began reporting findings linking pedophilia with brain structure and function such as lower intelligence, poorer memory tests, more non-right-handedness, greater rates of failure in school above what would be expected with lesser intelligence, decreased height, increased history of childhood head injuries leading to unconsciousness, and several differences in brain structures revealed by MRIs. Studies showing increased familial incidence suggest but don't prove genetic influences. Some studies suggest lower levels of testosterone but are of poor scientific quality. In summary, at this

stage of research, a definitive explanation of the cause or causes of pedophilia is not available.

Pedophiles are clinically characterized by other than their attraction to children of age 13 or less. They are almost always male. The children are more often of the opposite sex (about twice as often). Sexual fantasies, looking, fondling, or encouraging the child to perform a sexual act on the perpetrator are more common than intercourse.

With information on the true nature of pedophilia as background, we should now be able to evaluate the true nature of the sexual molestation of children by priests with clarity.

The most extensive information on sexual molestation of minors by Catholic priests was done by the church itself. The 2004 *John Jay Report* was based on surveys completed by the Roman Catholic dioceses in the United States. The surveys did not disclose the names of the accused priests or the dioceses where they worked. Information on each accused priest was obtained from files of the dioceses.

The report found that 10,667 people had made allegations of child sexual abuse between 1950 and 2002. Of these, 3,300 were not investigated because the allegations were made after the accused priests had died. In investigations of the remaining 7,700 allegations, the dioceses were able to confirm 6,700 accusations against 4,392 priests in the U.S., about 4% of all 109,694 priests who served during the time period of the study.

An overwhelming majority of the victims, 81 %, were males. A majority of the victims were post-pubescent adolescents. Just under 6% of victims were 7 years of age or younger, 16% were between 8 and 10. A large majority, 78%, were between 11 and 17.

Although a small percentage of the cases probably were consistent with pedophilia, the data clearly indicate the vast majority of the perpetrators clearly were not pedophiles. Most of the victims were post-pubescent and male. Pedophiles would have typically been involved with pre-pubescent children of the opposite sex.

The fact that the sexual abuse was mostly male on male and that the victimized males were mostly post-pubescent suggests that the main problem was one of homosexuality rather than pedophilia. Let's examine some of the evidence that bears on this subject.

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, there has always been a significant number of homosexuals. The male brotherhood has long been a strong draw for homosexuals, a situation that the church has been well aware of. The mass exodus of priests in the 1960s and 1970s who then married was not matched by an exodus of the homosexual priests, thus increasing the proportion of homosexuals in the church.

According to a wide variety of sources quoted on the website [religioustolerance.com](http://religioustolerance.com), the average of all their sources showed the percentage of homosexuals in the Catholic Church to be about 33%. The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLs), one of the most widely accepted of sexual practices in the United States, found that 2.8% of males identified themselves as gay or bisexual. The difference in the figures confirms the dramatically higher number of homosexuals in the Catholic priesthood as compared to the general population.

Homosexuals not only make up a significant portion of the Catholic priesthood, but there is good evidence that they have come to control much of it. Michael S. Rose, Catholic commentator and investigative journalist, in his book *Goodbye! Good Men* documents the domination of the priesthood by homosexuals. Rose interviewed more than 125 current and former seminarians, priests, and faculty from dozens of seminaries across the U.S. and Canada and names people and places in his detailed investigations.

Rose alleges a seminary underworld where homosexual promiscuity is rampant, straight men are marginalized and demonized, and seminarians who support the church's teaching on sexuality are persecuted. This corrupt system is perpetuated by

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a network of unorthodox and heavily homosexual seminary staff who weed out orthodox candidates, all under the ignorance or blind eye of the bishops.

Homosexuals in the priesthood who choose to break their vows of chastity are subject to special temptations when they leave the seminaries. The ready supply of possible adult sexual partners that was available in the seminaries is gone when they are assigned to a parish, and they are then brought in contact with many male children, teenagers who are altar boys or church school students.

As defined in the DSM, the evidence is that pedophilia in Catholic priests is probably *lower* than in the general population. Also, there does not appear to be a connection between homosexuality as defined in the DSM and pedophilia.

One of the most notorious priests in the Boston child molestation scandal was Paul Shanley. He was a homosexual priest who sexually abused teenage boys for decades. He emphatically stated that the problem in the Catholic Church was not pedophilia but homosexuality. He eventually moved to California where he opened a homosexual bed-and-breakfast resort in Palm Springs with a fellow homosexual priest.

The idea that homosexuality could

be a major factor in the scandal has evoked a reaction of outrage and ridicule by the groups that promote gay rights and by the media. Calling the problem pedophilia is a way of avoiding a connection with homosexuality. It's certainly understandable that the gay rights groups would want to deny any connection of homosexuals with the church scandal at a time when they are achieving well-deserved acceptance in society.

The impression I get from the gay rights groups and the media is that homosexuals simply don't sexually abuse children. In fact, *in the general population*, they don't any more frequently than heterosexuals sexually abuse children. In the right circumstances, homosexual men do abuse male children, and heterosexual males do abuse female children. Note that in the John Jay Report, 19% of the sexual abuse of children was committed by male priests against females.

Examining the legal age of consent for consensual sex around the world adds clarity to the reality that human sexual desire does extend below the age of 18. The age of consent is 14 in Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, and Serbia. In Spain, it's 13.

You might wonder what real difference it makes whether we call the child sexual abusers pedophiles or homosexuals. After all, sex with under-

age individuals is a crime, regardless of the sexual orientation of the perpetrator. Here are a few reasons that the differentiation is important: First, saying the abuse is by pedophiles covers up the fact that most of the perpetrators have been homosexuals. This truth must be squarely faced if all of the implications of the high proportion of homosexuals is to be thoroughly investigated and dealt with. Second, pedophilia in psychiatry is considered a mental disorder whereas homosexuality is considered a normal variant. Therefore, the pedophile should be under the care of a psychiatrist, and since homosexuality is a normal variant, it requires no treatment. Treatment administered by a psychiatrist can lessen the sexual urges of pedophiles but cannot cure the disorder. Third, imprecise definitions lead to imprecise thinking, and there could be other unforeseen negative consequences of this type of thinking.

Since the hypocritical Catholic Church has promoted homophobia while the priesthood has been populated by many homosexuals, I must confess to a bit of *schadenfreude*. Surely, this scandal will leave the church weaker and less influential, and that, in my opinion, is a good thing when we consider the many negative influences this institution has had on humanity through the centuries.

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## Hail to the Katherine

FINALLY, THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE IS ISSUING a commemorative stamp honoring the late Katherine Hepburn.

Ms. Hepburn was an accomplished actress, whose formidable personality on and off the silver screen endeared her to movie fans everywhere. She was known for her outspoken views, her utter honesty, her independence, and she became a feminist icon who inspired generations of young women to cast off the shackles of social convention and instead build their own lives. She was also an Atheist and defender of civil liberties and state-church separation. The current American Atheists Pod Cast,

"The Voice of Reason" details some of her many accomplishments (<http://www.atheists.info>), and recommends several books for those wishing to explore the life and achievements of this truly remarkable woman. "It is a gratifying sign of social progress to have Katherine Hepburn appropriately lionized for what she was—feminist icon, independent thinker and one of the great actresses of all time.—*Reprinted from AANews (American Atheists)*:

A happy memory for me was that day decades ago: by chance I caught her appearance on the *Phil Donahue Show* when Phil was interviewing the great Katherine. A longtime favorite of mine, on that day I learned also that she was an atheist. She was

very upfront about it, no mealy-mouthed ambiguous synonyms. At the time, I knew I had become an atheist but did not know any other person who owned up to atheism, so it was the first time I heard a public figure declare her/his atheism!

Irish-Catholic (but liberal) Phil spent most of the interview exploring her unbelief—seemingly fascinated, yet shocked. Gingerly he touched on her age—no longer a young person, she was closer to her mortality. He asked if the idea of not having a life after death was worrisome to her. She asked in surprise, "Why would it? I won't know anything then anyhow."

She lived a largely private life despite her fame, using its rewards for the good of our natural world. Way to go, O Great Katherine!

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Cave resides in Kentucky. There are dozens of caves and caverns throughout the United States, each with its own special personality and unique beauty.

But by far my favorite hole in the ground is in New Mexico: it goes by the name of Carlsbad Cavern.[1, 2, 3] I've already made three trips to this magic pit; and I'm ready to go again, anytime!

You know, a person can learn a lot from a hole in the ground! Carlsbad Caverns, for example, offers a great lesson in the geological evolution of limestone sedimentation. Formed over 60 million years ago by the eroding action of falling groundwater, it contains over forty miles of explored passages. It also possesses the world's largest underground natural chamber, called "The Big Room," which is over 4,000 feet long, over 300 feet high, and a mere 754 feet beneath the surface! With its constant year-round temperature of 56 degrees Fahrenheit, Carlsbad is also home to tens of thousands of bats, which present a fantastic spectacle as they leave the cave every evening. With stalactites reaching down and stalagmites straining upward, with all the color of the rainbow visible in the translucent and shimmering formations, with emerald pools of water—still as a frozen pond, yet liquid and vibrant—there is more than enough beauty to arouse the aesthetic passion of anyone!

But, it is a completely different hole in the ground that I want to talk about in this article, one that does not even exist—although, in its own way, it may be even more famous and certainly has been much more influential, for thousands of years, than any of the great caverns around the world. Usually referred to as the "*Allegory of the Cave*," this particular hole in the ground concerns *epistemology*, the doctrine of knowledge.[5] It was the brainchild of an ancient Greek philosopher named "*Aristocles*." [4:46-49] You may know him by the nickname his coach gave him. It was "*Plato*," a play on the Greek word meaning "broad shoulders." In any case, he was the second person of Greece's philosophical trinity which

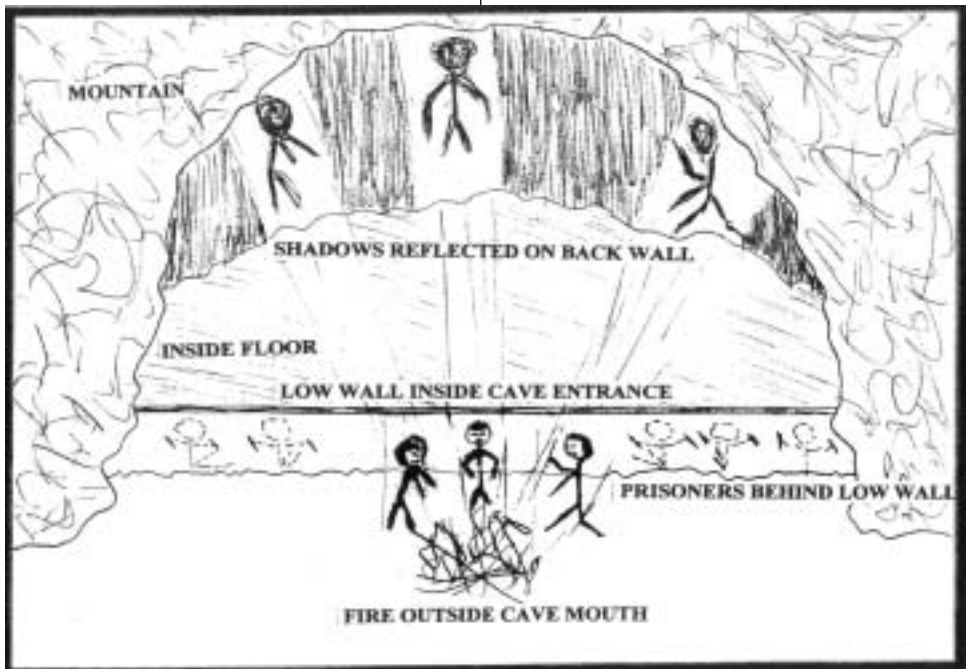
began with his teacher, Socrates, and included his student, Aristotle.

It would be hard to overestimate Plato's influence upon the Western world! As Alfred North Whitehead put it, all of European philosophy is but "a series of footnotes to Plato." [6:53] Moreover, so is much of theology. When he came along, Augustine re-invented Christian doctrine and based it on Plato. Augustinian Platonism remained the official dogma of Roman Catholicism from around 400 to 1200 when Thomas Aquinas re-invented Christian theology all over again, this time based upon Aristotle. Not until after the Enlightenment, in the 1700s, did the Western world begin to free itself of the influence of the man with the broad shoulders!

While I dislike Plato's metaphysics, I find much else in his writings that is worthwhile. In his dialogue *The Republic*, for example,

there is a campfire burning brightly. Slightly below that, and in between the mouth and the people down inside, there is a pathway running perpendicular to the sloping floor, and just below it, there is a low wall only about three feet tall which prevents the people inside from seeing anything or anyone up above them near the entrance. On the pathway, other people walk about, talking and carrying things. Light from the fire throws their shadows over the little wall so that they appear on the back wall at the bottom of the cave. Similarly, because of an echo, their voices and other noises at the entrance sound—to the people chained below—to be coming from the back wall as well.

Now, the interesting thing about Plato's cave is this: since the only thing they have ever known is what they see and hear on the back wall of the cave, the people chained inside believe that those shadowy



PLATO'S CAVE

he imagines a *cave*. [5] Down inside, on the floor of the cave there are people who have lived there since childhood. Each person is chained at the legs and the neck in such a way that he can only look toward the back wall of the cave, turning neither right nor left. As it goes inward, the floor of the cave slopes downward. The mouth of the cave is wide open, letting light shine on the back wall. Just outside the mouth of the cave

images and reflected voices constitute reality! If you were to ask them, "What is a person?" they would point to what they see on the wall.

Plato next has us imagine that an outsider frees one of the prisoners. What would be this liberated person's experience if, then, he got up and looked around? Why, he would be dizzy and confused! Able now to see the fire and even the sun outside,

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he would be dazzled by their brightness. His eyes would not yet be adjusted to seeing the real world. In turning back to look at the images on the wall, he would suffer night blindness, and they, too, would seem blurry. If, at this point, someone told him that the shadowy images were not real people, he would not, could not yet believe such nonsense! After all, his whole life long, “reality” had been whatever he saw or heard on the back wall of the cave.

Initially, the freed prisoner would want to turn away and flee from the painful and blinding light of the fire and of the sun.

But once the escapee is out of the cave, and after time passes so that his eyes become accustomed to the light so that he can see clearly, his situation changes: now he understands that what he saw on the back wall were merely shadows, and what he heard were merely echoes. The real world is the world outside of the cave. Now he rejoices that he has been saved from his former illusions.

Plato next suggests that we imagine the freed prisoner taking pity on his former fellow inmates so that he goes back down into the cave with the intention of giving them freedom, too. But, immediately, there is a problem, for as soon as he re-enters the darkness of the cave, the freed-man can no longer see things clearly. His eyes that could see truth clearly in the light of day are no longer able to find truth lurking among the shadows, and so he stumbles around, and the other prisoners laugh at him, saying that his vision has been ruined by exposure to the blinding light!

Plato has us imagine next that the returned escapee tells the remaining prisoners that what he has seen up above is the true reality and that the shadows and echoes they perceive down inside the cave are nothing but illusions and falsehoods. Well, guess what happens then: the prisoners get mad! If only they could get free, they would kill this crazy fellow, this victim of sunstroke who is so obviously trying to corrupt their minds with unbelievably stupid ideas!

Plato develops a full-blown epistemology, adding to his “Allegory of the Cave” another masterpiece of philosophic wisdom known as the “*Metaphor of the Divided Line*” (which I don’t have space for here).

In the space that does remain, however, I want to point out that those of us who are *Humanists* have much in common with the freed prisoner from Plato’s cave.

By illustration, let me remind you of this little synopsis which appears in each issue of this newsletter. Titled “*What Do Humanists Believe?*” it lists five basic principles that all of us accept. As I run through this list, just think about all of the persons, all the religions, all the philosophies, all the political viewpoints which do not share these beliefs, and you will see that we have become as special in our own way as had become the freed prisoner in the cave allegory.

“*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.”—Most of the several billions of people on this planet are *religionists*, *i.e.*, theists or polytheists of one sort or another. How many of them share this belief?!

“*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.”—In contrast [and with but a few exceptions, including Unitarian Universalists like myself and many of you], most religionists rely on revelation for their source of Truth ... and Truth, for them, outweighs any truths other people may honor. For biblical religionists, the intellect is, in fact, considered untrustworthy because they believe it has been forever damaged by Original Sin. They would not even trust it to inform them that it was

raining, no matter how wet their faces got as they looked up into a lightning-filled sky!

“*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 deficiencies, including altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and equal justice for all.”—Religionists, however, hold that their deity/deities are in charge of everything that happens—omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent and all that, don’t you know. (Which would also make their gods/goddesses logically responsible for all evil, pain and suffering, except that such logical analysis is forbidden to them as an inappropriate application of their Original Sin-tainted intellects, etc., and so does not enter the picture for them!) As for that list (altruism through equal justice), those items, if history is any example, only or mostly apply to the religionists themselves (and sometimes only to subsets within their own sects!), but never or seldom ever to all people everywhere at all times or in all places.

“*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.”—Well, virtually none of these things can be found in the history of any of the world’s religions. Ever hear of the Crusades, the Inquisition, burning at the stake, Galileo’s little problem, holy war or *jihād*?

“*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.”—Virtually every religionist accepts otherworldly theories of life after death and most religions, historically, have been and are mighty evangelical engines of (sometimes violent, even murderous) proselytization.

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## Upward and Outward

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Having reminded us of how different Humanists are from the rest of the world, let me close by briefly pointing out three lessons I think we ought to learn from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave."

*First: all of us should be happy and thankful as Humanists that we are free at last from our own former caves of confusion, basking in the warmer, brighter light of that truth and reality we have discovered. Our escape from the dark depths of deception is both a privilege and a responsibility which are not and never shall be enjoyed by most people. We have much cause for rejoicing and celebrating. We, of all people, should have smiles upon our faces—not mindless grins like those of many childish blind-faith religionists who obey their leaders without understanding—but rather the smiles which come to adults who (without cynicism, despair, or euphoria) have finally reached a mature understanding of the ways of the world and have accepted both the burdens and the blessings which such enlightenment brings.*

*Second: each of us should adopt an appropriate measure of humility. Plato's caveman was not able to free himself. Someone else had to free him! Most of us did not start out as Humanists. Most of us did not grow up in this philosophy or lifestyle. Nor did most of us intentionally try to create Humanists out of ourselves. Instead, most of us got here because someone else*

brought us here from wherever we were before (religiously, emotionally, or intellectually); or because some thing brought us here—perhaps some trait or problem within our previous worldview which made it unable to meet our changing needs so that it would not or could not be flexible enough to nurture our hearts and minds in the places they inhabit. In any case, most of us have not gotten here merely by pulling up our own bootstraps. Others have helped us or things and events have forced us to abandon our former religionistic caves and emerge into the light. Therefore, the smiles upon our faces should never be smug grins. Honest humility will not allow for that.

*Third, and finally, empathy and patience should characterize our relations with all non-Humanists [excluding, however, those who are violent or who are inappropriately or illegally binding our own or other persons' freedoms], for where they are now (deep down within Plato's cave) we too, have been. We should know and admit, from our own personal experiences, how absolutely convincing and believable the many illusions and deceptions in life can be when they provide the only perspective we have. No one still deep inside the cave can ever be convinced of the truth which lies outside. (This cannot be overemphasized or repeated enough!) Nor can full understanding ever be instantaneous. Because the expression "been there, done that" applies to us, we should be able to extend*

profound empathy toward those who have not yet escaped from their own caves. Because we know from our own experiences how long and difficult the process can be, we ought also to be able to exercise patience as others make their way, at their own pace, even as we did before them.

I hope Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and this survey of our own Humanist principles has provided you some food for thought. I suspect that none of us is ever completely free to roam outside the various "caves" of our lives. Therefore, my fervent wish for all of us is this: May we continue our epistemological journeys, always upward and outward, sharing with each other whatever we discover along the way.

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## Religulous

Continued from p. 1

Maher also outs the big business of religion: seamy 'sell-evangelists' hocking DVDs; an Orlando Christian theme park featuring daily crucifixion reenactments and a gift shop; a Creation Museum in Kentucky; the Catholic palaces in the Vatican; even an electronics lab to exploit Jewish Sabbath loopholes.

One reviewer lamented, "Overall, this is a wasted opportunity to have a greater conversation." But the "conversation" must come from the viewers. Which is just what we will do, following our viewing, after the laughter, and calling on our deliberations and insights.

## Must Humanists be Atheists?

EACH ISSUE OF *HUMANIST COMMON SENSE* includes key concepts about humanism, the American Humanist Association and Council for Secular Humanism (our national affiliations), and HAWCF itself (see p. 10). Look at that page—do you find the words "atheist" or "atheism"?

In a word: "No." Though Humanism does not advocate an intervening supernatural power, that is not the crux of our movement. Rather, Humanism is based upon the use of reason, education, science and human compassion to advance human welfare and happiness.

That said, many of its articles use the word "atheist" in their stories or their sources. Why is that? Though Humanism does not require that one call oneself an atheist, there is a commonality of purpose—particularly when it comes to our freedoms and the separation of church and state—between "freethinkers" of many stripes, including humanists, atheists and even some theists.

In reprinting articles for which we have permission, I do not feel we should change the text used in the original articles. But I would encourage you to think the word(s) that most describe the issue for you. Our attention is on the story itself. Thank you.

—The Editor

## Humanism ... and Neuroscience?

THE FOLLOWING MINI-ESSAY, I must admit, is purloined from an e-mail I received from another HAWCF member. She is commenting on a fellow member who questioned whether science articles should be featured in a humanist publication ... maybe we should just concentrate on church and state issues. Or on the debate about God, or his supposed interactions and interference in "his" world. Following are the e-mailer's thoughts—how relevant is neuroscience (or other sciences to Humanism! (I must admit to adding my meddling hand and editing the discussion a bit.)

My goodness! This person is 'way off the track! Why, Humanism, if it means anything at all—and we think it

does—has to do with life and with men and women. Neuroscience is simply one way of studying that life and finding out more and more about it—its motivations, its desires, its pleasures, its pains.

The great English poet Alexander Pope beautifully expressed what I'm trying to say, so I looked up his *Essay on Man*. Here are his words—in part only—there's lots more:

Know then thyself, presume not  
God to scan

The proper study of mankind is  
man.

Pope goes on at length, describing mankind in the most elegant words—it would take reams and reams to quote him. But that's not necessary: My point is that nothing is extraneous to mankind—not any knowledge that opens doors to clarifying life.

And Humanism is dedicated, is it not, to the understanding of life, and to helping people live with the great freedom and enjoyment that such understanding brings? To brush any kind of knowledge aside, as irrelevant to humanism, is simply too absurd to be countenanced.

As Humanists we don't exist simply to sneer at those so benighted as to believe in ghosts and spirits (though we can have some fun mocking the presumed ghosts and spirits themselves)—it is to elevate and to celebrate life! To dedicate ourselves to trying to make life something precious and satisfying. And in the process, to learn ever more about what moves life ... what makes life worth living, if you will.

Scientists working in many fields are trying to do just that. All the time. Amen.

## Focus on Freedom

Continued from p. 2

### California's Christian Right Targets Judges (continuing)

the courts with judges who adhere to the religious right's narrow moral agenda, threatening the impartiality of the court system and the separation of church and state.

This election strategy could transform courtroom benches similarly to that in some school boards, in which an increasing number of Christian conservatives run for and win seats in cities across the country. This tactic has resulted in regressive actions for school districts, even entire state school boards—*e.g.*, ideology trumping educational criteria for curriculum standards, as well as attempts to add religious practices (think Christian) into school events, affecting all the students.

San Diego County's District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis declared ... "Any organization that wants judges to subscribe to a certain political party or certain value system or certain way of ruling to me threatens the independence of the judiciary." She added, "... Judges should be evaluated based on their qualifications and their

duty to follow the law.

The AP notes that donations have ramped up significantly for this race. Calling the movement BETTER COURTS NOW, this campaign by social conservatives comes at a time when judges and scholars in many states, debating whether judges should be elected or appointed, are concerned that campaign contributions could influence judicial rulings. Some states have even relaxed prior restrictions to allow judicial candidates to express their opinions publicly so people can evaluate what are their biases.

"An effective way in driving policy is to try to influence who is on the courts in a state, particularly the highest court, the supreme court," said Adam Skaggs, counsel for the Brennan Center. "It's cause for concern because Americans expect courts to be places where people get a fair trial."

The BETTER COURTS NOW candidates have accused the California bar of being swayed by politics. Candidate Candelore said that a victory would mark only the beginning: "*If we can take our judiciary, we can take our legislature and our executive branch.*"



## Breaking News at Center for Inquiry

ON MAY 18, 2010, PAUL KURTZ—the founder and long-time leader of Center for Inquiry (CFI)—tendered his resignation to the Board of CFI, which quickly accepted it. Last year, he had been pressured to move from being Chairman of the Board to Chairman Emeritus. The reigning leader at CFI now is Ronald A. Lindsay. CFI staff and local advisory board members have signed a "Letter of Gratitude" thanking Paul for his much service.

On Tuesday, June 2, CFI restructured its staffing and local centers: the CFI Office of Public Policy (Washington, D.C.) and Center for Inquiry—Tampa have been closed, their leaders no longer in CFI's employ (Toni Van Pelt and Rick O'Keefe, respectively). In addition, staff positions for Norm Allen (Director of International Programs and Director of African Americans for Humanism), Henry Huber and Matthew Sapara have been eliminated. CFI leadership cited financial problems as the cause for the closures and changes.

We will miss the work of these lions of freethought. But just watch for their further contributions to enlighten our community and wider world.



The first letter was published on May 19, 2010, in the *St Petersburg Times* regarding a May 13 article: "Catholic school rejects gays' child".

### School's ugly act against a child

A famous biblical quotation reads, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16). Little children, that is, who are not besmirched by association with loving lesbian mothers?

How dismaying to read that a Roman Catholic school in Massachusetts has refused to enroll an 8-year-old son of a gay couple. One is appalled at the ugly mean-mindedness of any institution that projects its disapproval of parents onto an innocent child.

Come to think of it, children play a very minor part in the church's affairs. The flaming publicity surrounding the abuse of little boys and girls by priests has, for the Vatican, always centered on the harm done to the church—to the church's image, we should say. All the pious words of Pope Benedict XVI concerning "sins" and "justice" point to the church as victim.

Has the great founder of the church changed his mind about representatives of "the kingdom of God"?

Abigail Ann Martin, *Brandon*



Ted Utchen, a newsletter member living in Wheaton, Illinois, is a frequent writer of letters published in Chicago-area newspapers. The following letter was published on May 22, 2010, in *The Daily Herald*, a paper serving suburban Chicago. The theme is a favorite of his, and over the years several letters stating this position have been published. Accordingly, *Humanist Common Sense* is reprinting his published letter on this subject.

### Let's keep God out of our tragedies

The May 13 *Daily Herald* reports that a Libyan airplane carrying 104 people crashed on approaching Tripoli's airport,

leaving 103 of the passengers killed, and a 10-year-old Dutch boy as the only survivor. The Dutch prime minister hailed the boy's survival as a miracle, and the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town declared, "We thank God for the sole survivor. In his survival, we see that even in this dark cloud of death, there is this ray of hope."

These remarks by a prime minister and an archbishop greatly disturb me. What these gentlemen are telling us is that God saw fit not to save and bless the 103 persons who perished in this terrible disaster, yet He did single out the little 10-year-old boy to save and bless him. This approach turns our God into a deity that acts arbitrarily in refusing to save so many people on that airplane while saving one specially favored person.

Why would God act this way? I care not to worship such an arbitrarily acting god, and personally I do not believe God played any role whatever in this airplane crash. It was a sad event that happened at random, and God played no role in it at all. This approach gives me more comfort than to believe God was there and acted in such a discriminatory fashion.

And as for the archbishop's comment that God let the little boy survive to serve as a ray of hope for us, surely there are better ways for God to provide us with hope than to take 103 lives while singling out one life for survival. Please, let us keep God out of our tragedies.

Theodore M. Utchen, *Wheaton* [IL]



Preceding the next member letter is a non-member Letter to the Editor whose text is vital to understanding the topic. The first letter, published on May 17, 2010, in the *St. Petersburg Times*, referred to an article about a law suit to stop a Congressional law requiring the governmental proclamation of an annual National Day of Prayer.

### Try Some Tolerance

I'm an atheist. There, I said it. What I do not understand is all the turmoil over Good Friday, Christmas and the National Day of Prayer. The Constitution of the United States says fairly clearly that: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,

or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That simply means that the United States government shall not mandate a state sponsored religion (think Church of England). It also says that freedom of religious expression cannot be hindered.

While I have no religious convictions, I understand that it brings comfort for those who do, and is an important part of their life. I'm happy for them, and I will sit quietly during an invocation.

All these "turbo atheists" need to clam up. They have no right to try to force their lack of faith on the vast majority of Americans who are faithful. I have no problem with an invocation before a race, commission meeting or any other public function. These are Americans exercising their First Amendment rights. The turbo atheists have their First Amendment rights also, but not to the point of denying everyone else theirs.

Tom Woolford, *Beverly Hills*

Published on May 22, 2010, the *St. Petersburg Times* noted that the following letter was responding to Woolford's letter. The *Times* both named and edited this letter.

### Neutrality ensures liberty

I'm surprised that the atheist letter writer doesn't understand our constitutional religious freedom through separation of religion and government. I agree that none of us should care how people of any religion wish to pray, sing, worship, etc., so long as they do not interfere with others.

But it is a different matter for government to favor one religion over another, or indeed religion itself. If an organization wants to proclaim a "National Day of Prayer," go to it. But requiring the president and Congress to proclaim this as a matter of public policy is certainly unconstitutional.

Actually, a private organization does sponsor the National Day of Prayer. Publicly the day is portrayed as non-denominational, but NDP's website shows a different picture. Its online application to become a volunteer requires compliance with their Christian statement of belief.

The neutrality of government is the Constitution's greatest safeguard to each person's right to practice religion according to his or her own conscience.

Nan Owens, *Seffner*

## AHA Defines Humanism

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

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

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



### Definitions of Humanism

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

#### Humanism is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## What do Humanists believe?

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

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

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

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

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

## HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements

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

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

#### Mission:

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

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

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

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

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

Editor: Nan Owens

Associate Editor: Abigail Ann Martin

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## What is HAWCF?

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

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# Humanist Association of West Central Florida

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

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

## MEMBERSHIP

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I am interested in helping on the following activities

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

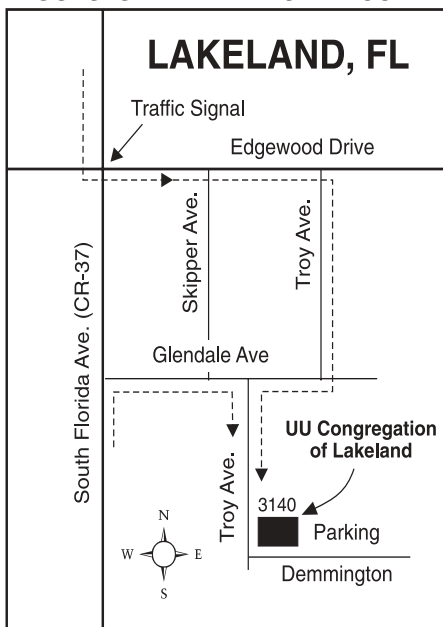
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

## WHEN AND WHERE?

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

See map below.

**GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!**



## HUMANIST DINNER!!

JUST A REMINDER: we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering on the **2<sup>ND</sup> MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.**



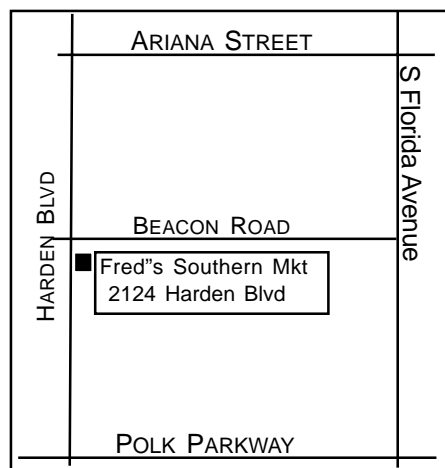
**NEW LOCATION— WE NOW MEET AT**

**Fred's Southern Market ...**

located at 2124 Harden Boulevard in Lakeland (just south of Beacon Road on the east side of the road).

See Map below.

PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



## SOS 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 held on the last Wednesday of every month, 7:30-8:30 pm at 3614 S Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Dates and locations will be beaded 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>

**BLOG ADDRESS:**

[www.humanistcommonsense.blogspot.com](http://www.humanistcommonsense.blogspot.com)

Please visit each of our sites. Comments or suggestions on either site are earnestly desired and should be brought up at meetings or made directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt:

[kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com)

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

**See inside for exciting news.**

are all grist for the Satirist's mill!  
along with politics and social customs...  
To modern-day comics, religion...

Can we treat religion as comedy—  
just as we do with other topics?



# Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

June 2010



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